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ABSTRACT

A child's best interest is served when parents enjoy and are satisfied with their family responsibilities. This book, for parents of children ages 2-10, illustrates how children learn their communication styles, imitate their parents, and acquire and modify their own dispositions. So that the family may be enjoyed by everyone, children need good early social habits and a feeling they are making a contribution. Toward this end, the book offers specific positive strategies for solving daily problems and reaching long-term goals. Part 1, "Understanding What's Going On," describes how to observe a child's behavior, plan reactions, and place blame and give credit in problem situations. Part 2, "Sending the Right Messages," describes looking for and rewarding specific good behavior, sending positive messages, and creating child involvement that creates a family atmosphere. Part 3, "Making a Few Good Rules," discusses planning sessions for reasonable rules, incentives, types of punishment, and alternatives to punishment. Part 4, "Listening, Coaching, and Teaching," focuses on careful listening and communication to encourage good social habits and school skills. Part 5, "Bringing Principles and Parents Together," synthesizes the strategies presented in the book and suggests the usefulness of parent support groups. (TM)

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For Parents of Children Ages 2 - 10

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Alternatives to Punishment
Techniques for Setting Limits
Developing Social Skills
Sending the Right Messages
And Dialogues and Examples
Backed by
Parenting
Skills

2

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Practical Strategies You Can Use Today!

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Roger W. McIntire

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Roger McIntire has taught child psychology and behavioral principles in family counseling and therapy at the University of Maryland for 32 years. He has written many books including *Teenagers and Parents* (Summit Crossroads Press), *For Love of Children* (Psychology Today), and *Child Psychology* (a college text by Behaviordelia).

Dr. McIntire has raised three children and, in addition to his work with families, he has been a consultant and teacher of teachers in preschools, grade schools, high schools and colleges. Dr. McIntire has also published research concerning infant vocalizations, eating problems, strategies in elementary school teaching, high school motivation, and college retention.

"The best promise for a child's happiness is a parent who enjoys the children and is content with the job."

In *Enjoy Successful Parenting*, Dr. McIntire is concerned with the parents' satisfaction with their family responsibility. The book maintains that the family should be enjoyed by everyone. For everyone to enjoy the family, the children need good early social habits and a feeling they are making a contribution. *Enjoy Successful Parenting* illustrates how children learn their communication styles, imitate their parents, and acquire and modify their own dispositions.

Dr. McIntire's examples are drawn from his experiences with family troubles that range from meal times to homework to general disobedience. He feels that most principles of child-rearing are familiar to parents but are forgotten in the hectic confusion of day-to-day family living. His books build parental confidence by suggesting specific positive strategies for solving daily problems and for reaching long-term goals. He believes the best promise for a child's happiness is a parent who enjoys the children and is content with the job!

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PREFACE

The best prospect for a child's happiness is a parent content with the job. And the best interests of the children are served when the parents enjoy their relationship with their children. Mom's or Dad's love and dedication will not have its best effect if frustration and helplessness produce a burned-out feeling only part-way through.

This requires early training to help the children to be socially skilled, considerate, and capable. Then the child will feel valuable to the family and parents will feel proud and confident. But first, you need some strategies for the rough parts.

The best interests of the children are served when the parents enjoy their relationship with their children.

"I don't want any of this stuff, it's icky!"
"Kathy, those are fresh carrots and they're good for you."
"They look like poo."
"Don't talk like that! Eat."
"Poo poo."
"Stop that. Eat your meat if you don't want the carrots."
"All poo poo. Want cereal."
"This is not breakfast, Kathy, and stop making a mess of your food!"
"Cereal! Daddy doesn't have any carrots!"
"Take some carrots, George."
"No thanks."
"George!"

"What? Making me eat them isn't going to help, maybe we should get out the cereal."
"Cereal! Cereal! Cereal!"
"Oh, all right, what's the use..."

Moments like this can make parents wonder if any reaction could get the right result! Some things your child does today may make you wonder, "Would any strategy produce a good result?"

Is there any way, short of a parental explosion, that would get Kathy to do what's right and leave Mom with sanity and a little contentment?

Yes, there are guidelines and rules for those on-the-spot decisions scattered throughout each day. But each parent needs to answer several practical questions first. The questions are: **For good behavior, you want to provide encouragement—but how much? Should you also point out the room for improvement? And for bad behavior, should you use punishment? What kind? How much? Or should you let them do what they want? How far can you stand to let that happen? Can Kathy live on just cereal?**

Answers to these questions should include a consideration of the parents' feelings about themselves. Punishments that make you feel like an ogre give you an ugly self-concept and will not nurture a healthy family environment for either you or your kids.

This book presents some possibilities in your day-to-day reactions that can help your children grow but also leave you with a good feeling about yourself.

Moment-to-Moment Decisions

For each moment of decision, **parents answer all the questions about encouragements and punishments with some reaction to the behavior of their children.**

That parental decision will encourage, discourage, or have a near-neutral effect on the child. Many times the children would like you to have a neutral effect. At times they will even conspire to convince you that you have no effect. *"You can't make me!" "I don't care!"* or just plain *"No!"*. It's their way of

struggling to make more room for themselves under the limits you are enforcing.

This is a common scheme also used by adults, armies, and nations: tell the opposition they are powerless. Don't believe it. It's true children have an individual make-up and they do go through their own stages, but remember your parents and the influence they had on you, now that you can look back from a distance. Although not always in the direction intended, their effect on your behavior was, and is, real, and your effect on your children is also real.

We are in the business of adult rearing, not really child rearing.

Every action of a child has some outcome. Usually it is a reaction from a parent, but even if the parent ignores the behavior, then that too is a message. You will have an influence today—not always in the intended direction, sometimes with resistance from your child, but **your child will make adjustments in crucial moments with you today—and everyday.**

We don't have time for a thoughtful reaction to every word or action of our children. The everyday behaviors require immediate decisions, judgment calls, by the one on the firing line at the moment. **This book is about fundamental guidelines for those moments.** It is about planning some reactions so that you feel satisfied, even happy, with your family role.

It also includes the pros and cons of possible strategies for dozens of specific practical situations and how to decide where to focus, when to be strong, and when to relax and allow free growth. With the help of this book, I hope you will strengthen a sensible and loving balance in your parental reactions, knowing when strong rules are appropriate and when room for more freedom needs to be expanded—again.

Possibly the most important guideline to parental happiness is to take joy in unfinished parental ambitions that are headed for imperfect outcomes. Many times this book presents an ideal situation that we all know is only a target to reach for while dealing with a real world. Most of the time, the suggestions and guidelines for that situation apply to both sexes, and I hope you will understand if I dispense with the cumbersome "she or he" qualifier in most descriptions.

The principles in this book are useful for parents with or

without partners. When dialogues and examples assume a parental partnership, single parents may need to do a little personal translating. They may also feel a stronger need for a parent support group as described in Chapter 15.

The goal of this book is to facilitate the process in which children grow up and deal with the consequences of the adult world. We are in the business of adult rearing, rather than child rearing. We want to raise happy adults who are competent in dealing with the real world. We don't want little adults by tomorrow, and we don't want them to miss childhood, but we do want them to mature as a result of experience while they are protected by the family. I have also assumed that you want to create an enjoyable family life for yourself in the process.

The five exercises will give you a chance to step back, take an objective look at how your children are dealing with their experiences and how you can plan your thoughtful reactions.

In some sessions, you'll be asked to review your priorities and practice some parent skills. You will want to repeat some exercises, especially the first one on "behavior pages" as new behaviors of your children come up. The planning and practice in the exercises will provide you with an extra bit of parental confidence and a greater satisfaction with your parent role.

Part One

Understanding What's Going On

Most parents know a great deal about raising children but in the everyday rush, good ideas are often trampled in the hurry and confusion.

- *Chapter 1 describes how to observe what's going on and plan reactions so that hurry and confusion will not get the upper hand. What's happening? When? What happens next? Chapter 2 deals with who takes the blame and who gets the credit in the family.*

Chapter One

Why Do They Do What They Do?

An employee who tells a joke and gets a laugh will probably tell another as soon as the chance comes up. The teacher who quiets the children by yelling at them, will probably yell more in the future. And the student who gets a break by complaining is likely to be a complaining student again next week.

Of all the variations of good and bad behavior, the most important influence is the immediate consequence for each of our actions. *Every person is continually making adjustments based on the consequences taking place around them.*

At home, the same rule applies. Although many habits of a child are made up, in part, by heritage or lingering reactions to events long past, your reactions right now influence your children's behavior and habits right now.

> ***Your reactions right now influence your children's behavior right now.***

Take a Close Look at What's Going On

If Brian screams in his mother's ear while she's driving, and the consequence is that Mom scolds him, the scolding has an effect, but not necessarily the one Mom intended. Brian may

have felt ignored at the moment and he may settle for Mom's attention in the scolding. If that's the case, yelling by Brian and scolding by Mom, probably make up a regular daily routine.

If Brian wants his sister to be quiet, the scolding may have accomplished that too even though no scolding was directed at her. Again, a regular routine is likely to develop. Or the yelling and the scolding may have taken attention away from his sister. He may repeat the routine for that.

For any of these reasons, **scolding may support, not reduce, Brian's yelling** and, if so, it's time for a change—a new strategy for action.

Perhaps Brian is set up for trouble because he's left with nothing to do in the car. Bringing along some new toys or games kept only in the car might help. Maybe Brian needs to know that scoldings are not bluffs and Mom should say, *"Brian, no yelling in the car; that's one!"* If Mom gets to three, Mom pulls over and puts Brian in the back car seat by himself and Sister up front (see "Count-Outs and Time-Outs" in Chapter 9). Maybe Mom needs to talk more to Brian in the car about things that interest him—perhaps he needs a little help in practicing conversation, so he won't be so bored.

Brian: *Spiderman!!! Yeaaaaa.*

Mom: *Brian, no yelling in the car.*

Brian: *Spiderman gets them. Yeah!*

Mom: *Brian, no yelling in the car; that's one. Oh, the trucks are lined up there at the weigh station, more than two!*

Brian: *One, two, three. Three!*

Mom: *Oh! All big ones?*

Brian: *Pretty big.*

Mom: *Here's another one, I wonder how heavy he is?*

Brian: *Big.*

Mom: *Spiderman could lift him.*

Brian: *Oh, yes, and take him away!*

Must Mom keep up this conversation all the way home? I think so. If Mom were riding with a friend, she would feel obligated to hold up one end of a conversation appropriate for their friendship—it would be a social expectation. Brian deserves the same polite effort, it's harder for Mom to do with Brian, perhaps, but it's not just to keep him quiet. If he gets to practice conversation and has Mom's polite effort to imitate, he will be ready for his turn to start a new topic.

What are the Consequences of What He Does, the Results of What You Do?

Brian's yelling during driving is dangerous and requires a strategy for action. But most behaviors by the Brians of the world don't deserve any planned consequence. What Brian talks about in the car may require only the most liberal limits and strategies. Mom can afford to be tolerant and good-natured and talk about Spiderman if she has sorted the important from the unimportant behavior. But if Brian goes in for more yelling, hits his sister, grabs at the wheel, or tries to open the door, Mom needs to take more direct action!

The most useful explanations of behavior deal with a child's adjustments to the everyday reactions of parents and others.

As you try to sort out the important from the unimportant habits of your child, you may find the theories and explanations of child psychology too vague to tell you what to look for. The theories frequently give accurate descriptions of particular situations, but leave you with little practical advice about how to deal with specific problems when you encounter them.

Most explanations of the mysteries of children have a thread of truth to them. All parents have recognized a little heredity in the actions of their children, watched them learn from experience, and have seen the effects of early crucial experiences both positive and traumatic. **But while all these explanations are a genuine part of child psychology and can help us understand a child, not all explanations are useful to parents in everyday situations.** Inheritance helps with understanding, and so does knowing about important past experiences, but

practical solutions to specific problems here and now will have to make use of our reactions here and now.

The most useful explanations of behavior deal with a child's adjustments to the everyday reactions of parents and others. Children make daily adjustments to get things to come out better. However, the influence of everyday experiences may be harder to recognize than the constant hereditary and semi-constant "disposition" and "personality" of a child. The influence of everyday needs can be confusing because they include obscure needs such as a need for solitude, or the opposite—attention, or he or she might be hoping for a peculiar form of attention such as a sibling's anger at being annoyed. If he annoys his brother, possibly he is entertained by the resulting argument. Another child may need rest, but demand television time as that "rest" for a less stressful change of pace.

Positive behavior and personality development in these first years comes mostly from growth and lots of loving stimulation.

So the theories and labels can help us understand a child, but they provide little advice about what to do each day. What can you do, for example, when told that your daughter is "hyperactive," "a little slow academically," or "lacking in social skills"?

Beyond medication, possibly nothing will be suggested except, *"Maybe she should try a little harder."* You might be told nothing can be done because the child is assumed to have been born shy, hyperactive, or slow socially.

But to say that nothing can be done is unrealistic because something will happen the next time she acts shy, overactive, or slow. And the next time a child ends homework in failure, the parents will react in some way. **Even ignoring the problem is a kind of reaction.**

In spite of the way they were born or conditioned, children make continual adjustments to the reactions of their parents as best they can, and parents adjust as best they can. One mother turned from a backyard talk with me to deal with her son who was screaming.

"Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!"

Finally she yelled back, *"All right! What is it?!"*

He said, *"Hi"* and ran away smiling.

She knew she had rewarded his nonsense with attention he didn't deserve and she had also given him an additional example of yelling herself, but what was she to do? She turned back to me and shrugged, *"Boys will be boys."*

Both boys and girls do their share of interrupting out of just being children, but the explanation shouldn't be used to excuse his behavior nor should it excuse Mom from trying a new way to make things better. Perhaps he should have been ignored—painful as that might have been. Perhaps she should have used the "that's one" approach suggested for Brian's yelling.

Careful Reactions with Toddlers: Why are the First Two Years Special?

The first two years are special. We all know babies are innocent and we know their understanding of their world starts at nearly zero. Parents hope to build communication fast and work at it all the time. They also look for signs of successful communication and marvel at the discoveries of progress. Enjoying the successes of a child is the greatest joy of parenting and we usually brag about it.

"Wilma slept through the night almost from the very beginning."

"Peter was walking by the time he was one!"

Our ambitions for our children can make us proud, but they can also lead us into an exaggeration of their accomplishments because we want to see progress so badly. We long for progress in our child's understanding so that our job as parents can become a little easier.

"It was obvious Terry knew right from wrong even before she could talk!"

"She understands "No!" just fine, she's just ignoring me."

Exaggerations in the areas of understanding and communication can be dangerous. They can lead parents to rules that are only confusing to the child and a frustration to the parents. **For the first two years, most behavior needs to be influenced directly without the use of consequences for learning.** For example, putting dangerous items out of harms' way is best for a toddler instead of "letting her find out for herself" that pulling on a wobbly chair is dangerous. The parent of a one-year-old should take him away from his older brother when the older one is about to hit the younger one—not let the younger one "deal with it." And we should provide the proper foods for a toddler—not "let him follow his own instincts."

Behavior and personality development in these first years come mostly from lots of loving stimulation. Learning, of the complex kind, is slow to develop. For newborns, stimulation by holding, cuddling, and talking will do more than provide comfort, it will "exercise" the brain and contribute to development. Needs should be met quickly, "crying it out" makes no sense to a person who barely knows what's the matter, let alone what "being patient" is all about!

For toddlers, parents need to do a lot of "environmental engineering." Remove and put out of sight all dangerous and fragile objects. **That will be a lot easier than trying to teach a child the difference between glass and plastic when he has yet to learn the difference between food and dirt!**

Parents of toddlers should be extra careful to separate the child from the action in both their own minds and in their corrections of the child. Blame is already a sensitive topic! For children under two, even time-outs (Chapter 9) are not effective. As an alternative, parents could remove the offending child from the situation and stay with him or her for a few seconds. The interruption should give both child and parent a fresh start.

What are the Useful Explanations of Behavior?

For ages beyond two, explanations of even simple behaviors can be numerous. We need one consistent plan of action that pinpoints the behavior and suggests appropriate reactions.

Careful observation may show that acting "inconsiderate," "tired," or "messy," can be sorted out by the time of day and by asking a few questions. Parents can ask each other how the problem developed, or, in the case of school work, they can ask the child questions about school that would tell them if a subject, problem or homework is frustrating.

Armed with more information from listening well (see Chapter 10), both Dad and Mom can react constructively with a rule that says: Messy mealtime behavior will result in the messed-up food being taken away for a time, or a rule that says: homework must be done before dinner.

The worst outcome from not planning thoughtful reactions to their child's behavior is that the parents will disagree and be driven apart.

Enforcing such rules without exceptions isn't going to create a happy home, but a lack of any thoughtful planning is going to leave the child confused at first, and then, with practice, the child will learn to manipulate the outcomes by "acting angry"" or "acting tired" when it promises to be an advantage with one parent or the other.

The worst outcome from not planning thoughtful reactions to their child's behavior is that the parents will disagree and be driven apart. They have their own stake in what happens in each situation and need time together to be cooperative. **Otherwise, the child gains too much control with a "divide and conquer" strategy** or by taking advantage of the confusion. With practice, a child can discover strategies to deal with the parents' habits, and the whole interaction can become unsatisfying and eventually downright destructive to the family.

In the past 30 years, many psychologists have concentrated on changes in individual behaviors. Some believe that because "inside events" such as mental processes and emotions cannot be seen, we should focus on the observable outside events—the behaviors and the reactions to them: what the child does to the world and what the world does to the child in return.

When behaviors are bad, "behaviorists" examine them not as symptoms of deeper unreachable problems but as the result of other outside events, the current experiences of the child.

Obviously there are some disadvantages to an extreme

behaviorist's point of view. Children certainly do have an interior life of feelings, emotions, thoughts, fears, and joys. Without a consideration of these real events, a great deal of understanding of children would be lost.

But an approach that is too theoretical can stop progress by giving us adults the temptation to blame it all on what's going on inside the child (he's tired) and to become overwhelmed by how complex it all seems (she's at a bad age). **If we conclude that nothing can be done because of conditions inside the child, we will be no help to the child.** We may also miss important events that happen just before and just after the problem behavior that could be altered for the better.

Understanding "Why?" by Asking, "What Happens Next?"

If we conclude that nothing can be done because of conditions inside the child, we will be no help to him or her.

As parents, we need to consider what's going on inside the child to understand his or her actions, but we will need to look outside—among the experiences of the child—to find opportunities to start changes. When Mom asks why her sons Richard and Billy fight and argue so much, she expects an answer in terms of their emotional constitution and other factors such as early experiences and sibling rivalry. Of course, these answers are a part of the story but if the answer is to suggest a procedure that would result in a change, the "Why?" must also be explored by way of another question, "What happens next?"

When parents have a special concern about a child, close observation will be needed, and the easiest way to do that is to keep a record of the behavior for a few weeks. Use the exercise coming up at the end of Chapter 2. Reserve a convenient place, a kitchen bulletin board, perhaps. Keeping a precise record of an undesirable behavior and its immediate consequences will be worth the effort because the record will show more than just the frequencies of the behavior. It will show the likely time of day of the behavior and trends across days of the week.

To use a chart with details of sequences of behaviors, you must single out individual problems. You can only record a few things at once, so you'll have to select one problem and let the rest go for the time being. For example, Mom could mark each time Richard and Billy fight. She could record what attention she gave to the uproar, who deserved the reprimand, time of day, and what the fight was about. The chart might show some aspects of the problem that have gone unnoticed. Possibly fighting happens when things get boring—late in the afternoon when parents are not available and the boys are hungry. Or maybe the fights begin just when the parents get home as the boys snatch for attention or become aggravated by the competition for attention while they tell their stories of the day. **Complicating the situation may be the possible attention that fighting itself attracts.**

...consequences must be judged by how they influence behavior and not by how we think we would react to the consequence.

The chart may lead to a new strategy where parents plan to listen and sympathize a great deal just as they get in the door. *"Wait a minute, I have to change and get dinner started"* may not be a good strategy! The chart may also show that fighting gets used as an entertainment of sorts to fill up the boring moments or it may be used to get attention, even negative attention, from parents.

It may seem ridiculous to think that children would fight to be punished by their parents, but one of the cardinal rules about consequences is that **consequences must be judged by how they influence behavior and not by how we think we would react to the consequence.**

Replace General Complaints With Specific Ones

When the important complaint has been identified, you need to focus on the behaviors that make up the problem. These could be unwanted behaviors that are occurring too much or wanted behaviors that are not happening enough.

In Billy's family, Billy attracted most of the complaints. For example, the complaint about Billy was that he was not always

neat. "Neat" is not exactly a behavior; it is a characteristic of many behaviors. When "neatness" happens is not easy to pinpoint.

Before we can go on to look for consequences, we need behaviors that can be easily identified when they happen.

We need a plan to encourage something the very first day, the very first moment!

Billy's parents needed to specify some of these behaviors so they could zero in and provide a clear message to Billy and have an obvious signal for their reactions: he doesn't comb his hair; he doesn't pick up his toys or clothes; he is dressed sloppily.

Billy's brother, Richard, was complained about for being too aggressive and inconsiderate, and Richard's parents had to zero in by noting that he makes critical and hurtful remarks to others, yells at meals, and hits his brother and anyone else who gets in his way. Putting the problem in definitions that are about the observable behaviors of Billy and Richard makes it easier to discover the answer to, "What happens next?"

Behavioral definitions, that is, defining problems by identifying the behavior that makes up the problem, have three goals:

1. To state the specific nature of the problem,
2. To help specify when consequences would be effective, and
3. To guide the search for the most likely good behavior to work with first. It must be simple enough and frequent enough to ensure opportunities for support on the first day of a new parental rule. The target behavior must be one that happens often enough to ensure enough opportunities for reward and to see the rule work.

Setting out a "reasonable demand" for performance is tempting, but this may reflect only what the parents think Billy and Richard should be doing. We need a behavioral level that takes into account their present level which is where we must begin—reasonable or not. **After things are going well, we can worry about the successive steps necessary to lead them to where they should be.**

So the long-range hopes for the future cannot be rewarded right now, but they can suggest what final behavior we are striving for as we encourage the present behaviors to start us

along the way. The behaviors of Billy and Richard that we want are not here, and Step 1, stating the complaint, has determined that we can't wait for them to happen accidentally. We can't even wait for slight improvements, we'll have to start with what we already have. We need a plan to encourage something the very first day, the very first moment!

Chapter 2

Understanding Blame and Credit

People usually explain what's happening by giving credit for successes, but for mistakes and failure, we distribute the blame in either of two ways: For our own mistakes we usually choose "outside blame" that finds the explanation in the circumstances outside of ourselves. We are unfortunate victims of situations outside of our control, "It was so noisy there, how could anyone think or be able to do the right thing?" "Outside blame" also includes people, "I was too distracted because people were coming so late!" When it comes to the mistakes of other people (including children), we are tempted to use "inside blame." "What (inside condition) makes him so inconsiderate, so clumsy? Why doesn't she pay more attention? What was she thinking of?!?"

By understanding the situation, we have a chance to discover solutions.

Where to Put the Blame? Where to Give the Credit?

Inside blame is a dangerous habit. Parents should use it carefully. It leads parents to frustration and inaction because the child is viewed as "having" (inside) a nearly unchangeable character.

Outside blame leads parents to look for problem situations instead of problem children. **With a good understanding of**

a problem situation, we have a chance to discover a workable solution, and that, in turn, gives the child a new chance.

In order to plan reactions to problem situations, you need a clear view of what's happening. Blaming the child doesn't help because it's too vague and it makes assumptions about what is going on inside the child. For example, the complaint that Tommy is "too demanding and selfish" refers to real actions of Tommy, but also says that his demands are intentional and unreasonable. The result is that the blame has been put inside Tommy and Tommy's parents are likely to look for the cure inside Tommy.

Blaming the child doesn't help because it's too vague and it makes assumptions about what is going on inside the child.

Tommy: *Daddy! Daddy!*

Dad: *Just a minute, Tommy, I'm listening to your mother.*

Tommy: *Daddy!*

Dad: *Just a minute!*

Tommy: *Daddy, I need to go to the bathroom!*

Dad: *What? Ok. (turning to Mom) I'll take him.*

Tommy: *I don't need to.*

Dad: *You just said ...*

Tommy: *I mean, I don't need any help.*

Dad: *Well just go ahead and go!*

Tommy (from the bathroom): *Daddy, I need help.*

Dad: *I'll be right there.*

Tommy: *I'm washing my hands!*

Dad: *So you didn't need help!* (Walks back to Mom) *He's so selfish! He wants our attention all the time.*

Mom: *Maybe we should forget the selfish part and try to give him attention for other things.*

Tommy: *Daddy!*

Dad (almost losing it): *What!?!*

Tommy: *I went to the bathroom...by myself.*

Dad (a little tired): *Yes, Tommy.*

Instead of fixing the blame (he's selfish), Mom suggested they look for the reactions Tommy gets for being so demanding. It could be that attention for acting selfish is Tommy's game. Even an argument about his demanding nature could be rewarding. As in Chapter 1, the "Why?" of behavior is again best answered by changing "Why?" to "What happens next?"

Tommy makes a demand and then what happens? **And, when Tommy is engaging in non-demanding behavior, what happens next?** A useful answer to Tommy's problem is more likely to be discovered in looking at the outcomes of Tommy's bad behavior and the reactions to his good behavior. This focus will lead to a plan to support Tommy's good behaviors and to exercise caution in reacting to unwanted behaviors. Later, when Tommy is having one of his rare moments when he has no demand, Dad could say:

Parents should be on the lookout to give credit for the good accomplishments of a child.

Dad: *Tell me about this picture you drew.* (Message: You don't have to act up or make demands to get Dad's attention)

Useful "blames" (explanations) are not in the basic character of Tommy nor in the basic character of Tommy's parents! **The useful answer is most likely found in the common give and take between Tommy and his family surroundings.**

Parents should be on the lookout to give credit for the good accomplishments of a child. This seems to be a less frequent family event. The good behaviors parents are looking for are less well defined in their own minds and that makes it less likely to attract parental attention. **Also the rule of giving credit only where credit is due gets in the way of generous support.**

Elton: *I got my room cleaned up.*

Dad: *Great!*

Elton: *I didn't pick up the parts to my blocks because I'm not finished with the fire station I'm building with them.*

Here's a crucial moment for Dad. His choices are: continue

support for what was done, after all, half a loaf is better than none, or hold out for a higher standard and only give credit when the whole job, with the blocks put away, is done and the credit is due? A definition of what is acceptable would help, doesn't Elton have the option of leaving one on-going project out? Elton's parents will have to make this judgment of Elton's progress and potential, but **the parental habit here should be to err to the side of support—there are few circumstances in child rearing where there is a danger of an overdose in support.**

...the parental habit here should be to err to the side of support

Another concern for Dad is what kind of credit to give. Outside credit may be no credit (support) at all for Elton. *"I guess the mess finally got to you. Even you couldn't stand it any more."* So Dad shouldn't give the credit to Elton's environment for driving him to do the right thing and Dad shoudn't pull the credit to himself by saying, *"Well now, didn't I tell you that would be better?"* Dad sends the credit directly to Elton for getting the job done like this.

Dad: *Well, you still need the blocks out; you would have to just about wreck your firehouse to put it away. You have it looking good in here with only one project out.*

Looking for Needs and Wants Instead of Blame and Credit

Recognizing the priorities of needs can sometimes explain the otherwise puzzling fate of some rules. For example, I worked with two very different sisters whose reactions to cleaning up their room was very confusing.

Debbie needed to be constantly assured that her parents thought she was capable and successful and she tried hard to be cooperative and helpful.

Her sister, Susan, also seemed to value her parents' approval but wanted attention and companionship more than praise.

A rule that reminded their mother to praise both daughters for keeping their room nice worked well for Debbie seeking

praise but since attention ended when the room was done, attention-seeking Susan procrastinated to keep the cleaning going on and on. Susan prolonged the room-cleaning chores for the attention she received—even negative attention would do—while our more goal-directed Debbie worked hard for the confirmation of her success.

Mom may like her daughters to pick up their room to keep the place looking nice, but why does she have to be right on top of them while they do it? The reason may be that while she thinks having a nice room is the point of the clean-up (a long-term goal), the daughters' priorities may be quite short-term— one wants assurances that she is contributing (doing it right), the other wants attention for doing any work at all! Mom has two strategies at work.

One strategy Mom carries out deliberately—encourage them when they clean their room; the other strategy is an unintentional one of giving unusual attention to Susan's procrastination. So Susan slows up for attention, but Debbie finishes up for praise.

The solution for Debbie's and Susan's mother came with the insight that Susan needed attention at the end and long after the chore was completed. This attention did not need to be in the form of praise for room-cleaning; it just needed to continue in order to show Susan that finishing the room doesn't finish Mom's attention.

It would be a mistake to conclude that Debbie wants to please Mom and Susan doesn't. Or that Susan just wants to aggravate her mother and she just better start making more of an effort! These conjectures about sinister Susan would only lead to more nagging and a sour turn in Mom's relationship with Susan. Mom is the adult and she has to make the special effort, after room-cleaning, to be interested in Susan.

The Temptation to Blame in Years Five to Ten

As a child grows up, blaming the person is increasingly tempting for parents and this habit can distract parents from looking for a chance to give good personal credit when it is deserved. For example, you might know an older child who is moody, disrespectful, rebellious, or cynical. This might be a

"long-standing habit" (inside blame) and his parents may think, *"That's just the way she has always been."* But even older children act the way they do partly because of the way they are treated—because of what has ordinarily happened next.

Older children may be disrespectful because the only time they are taken seriously is when they act that way, or their bad behavior may produce an entertaining argument, or **their bad talk may seem more "adult" than saying something pleasant. Even some adults believe that!**

When the disrespectful child turns happy and cheerful, adults may pat him on the head and tell him he's a "nice boy" but otherwise ignore him. The usefulness of bad behavior in this situation is not lost on the child.

Showing respect for the child by asking for her opinion, showing confidence in her abilities, and doing a good job of listening (see Chapter 10) will bring out an improved form of respect in return. This strategy, an example to be modeled, encourages social behavior that will replace "disrespectful" behavior.

Dad: *It's too early to start the garden outside, but we could start seeds inside. What do you think, Elton?*

Elton: *What good would that do?*

Dad: *Later, when you plant them outside, they have a head start.*

Elton: *Even melons and stuff like that?*

Dad. *Even melons. Let's do melons.*

Where Do the Kids Come Up with These Behaviors !?!

Parents are often amazed at the variety of behaviors—both good and bad—their children show. If you find it difficult to sort out the good behaviors you want from your children, then you can see how difficult it will be for them to find out how they should behave. Of all the possibilities, what will they try first in a new situation? Most of the time they will try what worked best for them last time or in a similar situation. **If**

nothing comes to mind, they may try out what you do! If it works for you, maybe it will work for them.

Just as you always provide consequences for them, you are also an example. Kids may deny it, adults often do, saying we won't do this or that the way our parents did. But then we are surprised to find ourselves acting very much like our parents. *"I can't believe I said that, I sound just like my father!"* Your parents found the best adjustment for their problems, so you probably went with their choice, and so your children will follow you, and you will show them the way. When your children agree with you, you will support them, that will be a reward, and another habit, good or bad, will pass along to another generation of the family tree!

Even older children act the way they do because of the way they are treated.

So it's not always genetics, sometimes it's just plain old imitation. As one mother once said to me, *"I can't understand why my children are fussing at each other all the time. I'm always fussing at them about it!"*

Mom: *Carolyn really tries hard to be pleasant when any of the family comes over to visit. She asked Aunt Mildred if she wanted some of her cookie!*

Grandma: *I think she takes her cue from you; you always try to make sure everyone is comfortable when company comes. It just rubs off.*

In another case, a father and mother came to me for help in dealing with their son whose main difficulty was his disrespect for others, particularly his mother. "Disrespect" was defined as making sarcastic remarks, ignoring direct questions, and insulting her.

The father said he thought Mom contributed to the problem by being "wishy-washy" and not "standing up to her son, even if she was a woman." He thought she probably got this attitude from spending time in "big conferences" with some of her "silly friends."

It was easy to see where we needed to start and it was a

surprise to the father that it was with the example he set for his son to imitate. The habit had become strong and the son expected praise and admiration for his behavior from his father. As we will see in "Parents Protecting Each Other" of Chapter 15, cooperation and support between parents is needed not only for extra consistency, but also as an example to children of how to treat their parents!

The Habit of Allowing Practice

Some practice happens by accident; some requires your planning. For example, learning to use a spoon at dinner comes from using it in the sand box as well as the dinner table. Learning to use words may come from accidental practice and some planned practice, or at least planned encouragement and modeling from the parents.

When practice has been lacking, painful experiences are ahead for the child.

Learning to talk comes from conversations and from listening to the reading of stories and comics where imitation is possible. But in reading to a child, practice may or may not be allowed by the parent. The child may be asked to tell the story of the Sunday comics after the parent has read them—that would provide some practice in talking and in imitating Mom and Dad.

Listening itself is not practice. If the comic is simple, the child may be able to tell the story without a preliminary reading by the parent. For the more complicated ones, he or she can retell them. In this way comics become an entertainment, an enjoyment of talking and telling and learning. **All of this takes more time, but what was the point of allowing time for comics in the first place?**

When practice has been lacking, painful experiences are ahead for the child. Life has disadvantages awaiting a girl with little experience deciding what to eat, when to eat, what to wear, when to wear it, what to say in making the dental appointment, and when to conserve money. In childhood and teenage years she will feel a little inadequate, dependent, and may question her own worth. As she leaves the family protection, she will need to learn fast in a situation that is not as loving as the family, and she will bring little confidence to the

task. **Growing up, that is, practicing to be an adult, requires a lot of parent-planned practice.**

As the girl or boy who is "untutored" (that is, unpracticed) leaves for college or work or both, a last minute barrage of instructions will be blurted out. Whether practice was left out because it seemed to risk too many mistakes, take too much time in the frantic family activities, or was withheld for protection's sake, in the end, parents realize there are consequences to reap and now they rush to get in all those cautions. *"Make sure you brush your teeth, comb your hair, get your rest, start your checking account, and choose friends wisely!"*

Growing up, that is, practicing to be an adult, requires a lot of parent-planned practice.

The first experience being away from home can be all the more difficult and lonely if our offspring-now-sprung has little confidence in deciding what to wear, when to study, when to take it easy, and when to rest. Many of my college students go to a campus counselor with the complaint that no one seems to care about them at the big university. A great deal of the "care" the student misses should have been withdrawn years ago to make room for practice and pride in self. **The only place there is love enough for all that practice is in the family.**

One of my students complained about doing his own laundry because he didn't understand all those selections of cycles and what to wash with what. I joked that he could throw away his socks and underwear when they got dirty and buy new ones. Taking me seriously, he cried, *"I don't know my size!"* For 19 years the little number on the back elastic of his underwear followed him around, but he had no need of it as long as Mom did all his laundry and shopping.

Almost all of my students managed to survive the passage from home to campus despite painful evenings learning to care for themselves and gaining confidence in doing the everyday necessities of living. So lack of practice didn't cause a great deal of permanent damage. But in many cases, a critical period of childhood that would nurture a knowledge of self-worth and a comfort with life was missed. Later, complete development of self-contentment may be difficult or impossible to secure.

Exercise and Summary for Part 1

The purpose of the five exercises of this book is to clarify and organize your own view of child rearing. In the later exercises I hope you will develop a custom fit of the notions in the chapters, your philosophy, and your daily parenting.

You'll need a notebook for the five exercises. It will be a good future reference and intellectual exercise to sort out what's going on in each situation. We have included several behavior pages in the back of this book.

Fill In the Seven Steps of a "Behavior Page"

The first exercise creates "behavior pages" so that the questions of "What happens next" and where to place blame and credit will be clear in your mind when it's time to react to your child.

You'll need to return to this exercise to make several different behavior pages. For this first session, examples are provided for each part.

1. **The first description is a statement of the problem in detail.** Often this provides more help for the parent than other parts of the exercise. Just writing down what exactly is bothersome allows Mom or Dad to pick their targets for attention and find room for positive support when that is deserved.

2. **What triggers the action?** Think back to the last few times the behavior has happened. What started it all? Who was involved? What time of day was it? Does this always occur in a certain part of daily routine—bedtime, meals, siblings are absent?

3. **What happens next?** You may have to think back to some of the last moments of the problem to remember

exactly what ordinarily happens right after. Long-term consequences can play a role, but we need to understand the immediate effects to start with.

4. **Possible blame and credit.** Sometimes this part will not be applicable to the subject at hand, but often an objective statement about where each person thinks the fault lies will direct us to action without having to badger the transgressor about blame.

5. **At what age would you expect an average child to do what you are hoping will be done in this situation?** Don't skip this part. Often when parents consider the age they would expect an ability to develop, they realize they are ahead of the child's schedule in their demands and expectations.

6. **How could you allow more practice?** Is it possible to provide more opportunities for the child to try out his/her behavior with your loving support handy?

7. **A close, objective look at what's happening and the effect of your reactions is often a good starting place for pinpointing a problem.** For this exercise, set out a sheet of paper similar to the one below. Try to keep a record for a week so that you can review a good sample of the action.

A Behavior Page

Question 1 What is an objective description of the behavior?
(Example: Fred disrupts dinner, makes noises, cries, complains about the food.)

Question 2 What triggers the action?
(Example: Happens when dinner is late and I give him something to "hold him over." Or, didn't happen when his sister was at grandma's.

Question 3. What happens next?

(Example: We usually try to get him to eat or tell him to stop acting up, he hangs around and makes trouble anyway.)

Question 4. Where would you place the possible blame and/or credit?

(Example: He's just trying to get attention, also he eats junk between meals, it's a power game.)

Question 5. At what age would you expect an average child to do what you are hoping will be done in this situation?

(Example: He's four. He should be able to eat at the table without making extra trouble.)

Question 6. How could you allow more practice?

(Example: He needs more practice conversations, we should stop the junk food between meals and find appropriate topics when he is at the table.)

Question 7. When do things happen? (keep a record similar to the one below)

Date/Time	What happened?	Just before this?	What happened next?	Special situation and remarks
Monday/ breakfast	Cried/started hitting	Ran out of his juice	Told him to try other juice	Bad night's sleep
Monday/ lunch	Went OK, he talked about preschool	Had preschool	He watched TV while I cleaned up	
Monday/ dinner	Went OK once he had the toy he wanted at dinner	Playing by himself	We watched Sesame Street together	Sister was away at friends for dinner
Tuesday/ all meals	Not good, fighting, not eating	Morning shopping	Put him for nap after lunch; he cried	Shopping always makes him tired
Wednesday	Good, no problems	Good weather, he played outside	Went back outside	Things always go OK when he gets outside playtime

PART 2

Sending the Right Messages

Friends and Searchlights

Friends bring out the best in me, and I like the "me" they draw out. When we meet, their attention sweeps the common ground between us looking for sparkles to highlight. I return the compliment. Even a child can help create this atmosphere with a good model, but the adult must make the effort to begin this circle with a child.

Parents and their children should be friends. Not in the sense of enjoying the same music or having many friends in common or playing similar roles in the family, but in the sense of enjoying time together.

Some people have another focus. Their search overlooks the good I try to provide and zeros in on vulnerable spots. I pull back and risk very little because I know what they're looking for. I cover up.

Aim <u>your</u> searchlight carefully. What are you looking for?

Chapter 3
How to Catch 'em Being Good!

We know very well what bad behavior is, fussing, doing dangerous things, fighting, making messes. But the words we use for good behavior are often less specific: be nice and act right. ***Not having an exact idea of what good behavior should be, we often describe our expectation by what we don't want: don't ...ake trouble, don't yell at your sister, don't bother and fight with your brother.*** *But what's a child to do?*

What should a parent look for in a child's choices of action? Descriptions of behavior with "not" and don't" in them are hard to use because it's hard to know when, for example, "not fighting" deserves support. Better to think of specifics—help set the table, say something complimentary to your sister, give your brother a toy he's been looking for.

Vague expectations about good behavior and specific descriptions of bad, lead to unbalanced parental reactions with bad behavior attracting most of the attention while there is little reaction to good behavior because it is not spelled out well enough to be easily noticed. Getting down to the specifics of good behavior leads to new advantages.

1. **Parents become alert** to the small successes that are the parts of larger concerns.

2. **Children get clear messages** about behavior.
3. **Parents provide good examples** of how to encourage others.
4. **Children develop and improve with small easy steps** instead of becoming discouraged in front of a large obstacle.

Pinpointing the Small Successes

To plan a "catch 'em being good" rule, **parents need to be on the lookout for their children's successes and the good behaviors** that will allow Mom and Dad to agree on positive reactions to their children. Pinpointing also helps parents discover that things are going better than they realize. These behaviors are usually just small parts of a larger habit or characteristic of their children. For example, considering how to encourage a child who is "shy," is a complex problem because such an over-used and abstract concept of a person does not explain the little events from the average day that make up the impression of "shyness." It is too large and covers too many emotions and habits.

We need to know what behaviors to look for in order to pinpoint what is worrisome and when to react.

We need to know what behaviors to look for in order to pinpoint what is worrisome and when to react. **Without the pinpointing, the temptation is to try to talk the child out of being "shy."** *"Oh, come on, there's nothing to be afraid of here!" "Just say hello." "Go over with the others. What's your problem?!"*

The problem should be restated in specific terms. *"He doesn't talk very much"* or *"He hides when company comes"* or *"He likes to play alone."* That way, parents will know when they want to encourage change (we'll encourage him a lot when he has something to say) and when they want to avoid the risk of embarrassing their child with unwanted attention (playing alone is OK). Also, **focusing on a few behaviors to encourage replaces the habit of blaming the whole child, "putting her down," and sending the message that she should be ashamed of her own personality.**

Too often complaints deal with behaviors we want to reduce or get rid of. Problems come to our attention because

we see the bad behavior. Complaints about weak good behaviors are not as common as complaints about the bad. It's easy to complain about a shy child who cries when strangers come, but what reactions can be expected if the child should risk some other social behavior? Shyness produces attention and little reprimands and excuses. What does non-shyness produce?

One learns what one does!

A careful parent might plan mild encouragements, possibly even practice what could be said in a planning session, "That was a nice 'Hello.'"

With a companion plan to provide attention for those non-shy moments, things might improve for the patient parent. A request to get away from the visitor might be answered with, "OK," with no additional begging.

Learning to Practice and Practicing to Learn

The focus on good behavior identifies the specific practice that is likely to lead to improvement. **Children (and adults) learn by doing—by practice.** Practice allows trial and error in the protection of the family where parental encouragements can consistently motivate more practice and emphasize the benefits of better behavior. If parents work out more exactly what is happening and what they want to happen, then they can apply this fundamental law of learning. *"One learns what one does!"*

Anyone who has ever tried to play a musical instrument, improve in a sport, or raise children knows that just talking about it is not enough. **Readings and lectures and memorizing rules can help, but real practice is crucial!** It's true that even in golf there are helpful hints and rules to learn, but all golfers know the only way to improve is through practice. **And all golfers know fellow players who still search for the magic gadget or secret technique for success while they avoid practice time.** The notion applies equally well to social behavior, controlling anger, getting along with siblings, homework, tooth-brushing, and money management!

So helping a child listen and pay attention to advice is not enough, he will have to try out your instruction, test your rules, and then, if the consequences and encouragements are there, he

will learn. The progress itself—the result—will have to come from practice. **That is the main role of a family—to provide a place where successful practice will be supported and mistakes will receive only constructive reactions. The family should allow for safe practice without cruel punishment for mistakes and with a person who cares enough to support successes.** Good family members are those who care

Practice Makes Almost Perfect

Learning has to do with practice, it is the result of practice. Many parents realize this and tell their children to "work hard" in school. It's good advice but, by itself, it leaves out the specifics. Children need to be shown the particulars of the practice. **Successful work shows up in grades if the student is shown how the "work hard" idea is turned into overt practice—not just staring at pages, but reading aloud; not just "trying to remember," but talking to others about the work, drilling important concepts, rewriting notes and important material, and drawing new diagrams or tables that organize facts differently.** That's how the idea of "work hard" becomes successful learning.

The family should allow for safe practice without cruel punishment for mistakes and with a person who cares enough to support successes.

If you are skeptical of this strategy, try the following experiment. Pick out a favorite magazine in which there are two articles or stories you have not yet read. Read the first story to yourself in your usual way. Find someone to listen to your report of the story or article and tell them all the detail you can remember—who wrote it, who was in it, what was going on, conclusions reached and so on.

Now go back to the magazine and read the second article or story. This time, stand up, and read out loud, with good emphasis and inflection—to the wall if necessary. Now find your listener again and report this story giving all the details you can remember of who, what, and where. By the end of the second report, you will notice how much more you remember of the second story. As one student put it to me, ***"Well of course I remember that one, I remember what I said!"***

For the purpose of learning and changing habits there is no

substitute for active practice. **On your vacation, stare at pages on a beach if you enjoy it, but if it's for learning, "work hard."**

We all need to remember the idea of practice in school work, and we understand the necessity for practice when teaching something new. But when we are not teaching such things as tying shoelaces, playing the piano, or hitting a baseball, we often forget the essential ingredient of practice. It applies just as well to bedmaking, dishwashing, and manners in polite society. If you, as parent, do these jobs for your child, they get no practice. It is easy to be overprotective and slow down learning. *"I'll cut the meat," "I'll pour the milk," "I'll read, you listen,"* and *"I'll call and see if your friend can come over—you wait."*

If you, as parent, do the bedmaking, dishwashing, laundry and other jobs for your child, there is no practice for him.

Some parents will protest that if they let their child do these things, mistakes will happen. She might cut herself while cutting the meat, spill the milk, waste time reading instructions, or say the wrong thing on the phone. All true.

And each parent will have to make the judgment—is she/he ready? Is she ready to gain <u>something</u> from practice and mistakes? We shouldn't wait until she's ready to do it <u>without a flaw</u>. Without practice, that time may never come.

Another advantage to early practice is that your child can gain much to be proud of <u>now</u>. It's true we can't give a steak knife to a two-year-old or a gallon of milk and a small glass to a four-year-old, but we need to set up practice situations so that we can guarantee our opportunities to be encouraging and praising. A wise parent creates practice for success, <u>and</u> for self-respect. A butter knife for the bread, a small pitcher for milk, a chance to "read" (tell about) the picture in a story and a chance to call a friend just for fun—all of these are good steps forward in learning.

Use Small Steps and Big Rewards

Perhaps you found that, in learning to play a musical instrument, even practice was not enough. And yet practice was enough to perfect your handwriting. **What are the differences between your brief piano experience and your "learned**

forever" handwriting?

In learning to improve your handwriting, you were rewarded not only for the hours of practice but also for the first little successes. You wrote your own name, a friend's name, then a secret message, a note to a friend, then a letter to grandpa. The improvements were useful, shared with others, and practice continued.

Sometimes piano lessons are successful because learning a favorite piece or popular song was part of the early training.

But too often the first improvements in playing the scale on the piano produce little or no admiration, seem of little use, and are a long way from the performance dreamed of. Sometimes piano lessons are successful because learning a favorite piece or popular song was part of the early training. If that consideration was a part of your lessons, practice probably continued. If not, you may have quit, but **I bet you remember to this day the pieces you liked, that attracted some attention, and that were enjoyed.**

If rewards come early for the first little successes, then a child will want to practice more on other small steps. If only big successes attract encouragement and little improvements are ignored, a child can become discouraged along the way, *"I'll never be <u>really</u> good."* **It is not the pot at the end of the rainbow that keeps the practice going, it's the next pat on the back or penny in the bank**—and for some tasks parents need to be frequent and generous in providing rewards.

The most common error when beginning to teach something new is to demand too much for too little. The first steps need big rewards—not necessarily tangible goodies but plenty of encouragement. *"This sounds like bribery,"* you might say. *"Shouldn't a child do most of these things without contrived rewards—can't they do it just for the love of learning?" "Some children are good and do what is expected without rewards, don't they?"*

To answer these questions we need to realize that those good little children <u>were</u> rewarded—socially and with parental respect and praise—a great deal. Some children start early and well, with plenty of encouragement. They perform so well that they receive a great deal of praise and a snowballing effect begins that is an advantage for years to come. **If a child starts**

off with good encouragement and is well rewarded, he keeps going; if he keeps going, he is further rewarded and so on.

Snowballing can work the other way also. Some children don't receive rewards or attention for the first steps to good performance and learning. They don't expect rewards because rewards were never given in the past. They might do just the minimum out of fear, but only the minimum and not even that when the threat is gone.

So without someone attending with positive feedback, the child misses out on encouragement and slows up or stops practicing the tasks altogether. Without practice, more opportunities for encouragement will be missed, resulting in even less practice. As the child falls further and further behind his parents' expectations, any performance that should have been encouraged earlier will be ignored because *"He should have done that long ago."* Now even meager attempts at catching up are discouraged. If his success is viewed as "too late," the "pay" may be nothing. Without some "pay" he will be falling further back.

Stanley: *These math problems are really hard.*

Mom: *You're really getting into some hard stuff now.* (See "reflective statements" in Chapter 10)

Stanley: *Yeah, they take too long.*

Mom: *You got the first one, you should show your brother.*

Stanley: *Hey, Larry, look at this!*

Larry: *We did those last year.*

Mom: *And they were hard, but Stanley got the first one.*

Stanley: *I'll try one more.*

Mom's intention here is just to show respect for what Stanley has done so far, and a little encouragement to show it off. Larry doesn't help much, but Mom remains on the positive side and Stanley puts in a little more effort.

Does this mean that all successful parents are secret bribers—blackmailers? No. First, these words are unfair because they imply a situation in which a person is trying to corrupt another person so that he or she will do something wrong and usually illegal. Second, we are all interested in some return for our effort. No one works for nothing. Some work not for money but for the satisfaction rooted in the reactions of others. **But some quite real reaction or outcome motivates us all. The reward may be as subtle as another person saying we are doing well or as obvious as salaries for Congress and fees for doctors and lawyers.**

In the adult world of raises, benefits, and strikes, the importance of the consequences for our efforts is always apparent.

In the adult world of raises, benefits, and strikes, the importance of the consequences for our efforts is always apparent. On one occasion a father rejected my suggestion for encouraging his son's homework behavior by saying *"He should be grown up enough to want to do the right thing without some payoff!"* When it came out that the father was on strike for more money and was getting support from a union strike fund, his defense was that he was an adult. With his experience and knowledge he felt he deserved a tangible reward (as well as admiration and respect). **His son, without experience, without success, and without respect, was to take his responsibilities for the love of it.**

So in addition to the practice, we need the recognition, the respect, the encouragement and the rewards. With all that success will come self-respect and self-esteem.

Practice, then, is not just the repeating of lessons, songs, or good social habits. It requires consequences, parental reactions that provide appreciative feedback for the improvements.

Short-Term Benefits and Long-Term Goals

While sorting out what happens next, both immediate and delayed reactions need to be considered.

Mom: *Why does she go running out of the house without a jacket? She knows she gets a cold every time!*

Dad: *George at work snacks all the time, he's overweight, and he can barely climb a few stairs without panting. Someday he'll be a death-due-to-donuts! Can't he see what he's doing to himself?*

Teacher: *I run two miles every morning. Sometimes it's hard to get started on it, but I feel better afterwards.*

Jenny: *It's a good TV night, but if I attend every scout meeting, I'll get a merit patch!*

Behaviors tend to follow the short-term benefits at the expense of long-term goals, but with a few positive experiences, long-term consequences can overpower temptations, especially if someone supports the effort. How can a parent help this process of considering the long-term benefits of good behaviors and the long-term problems of bad?

One common strategy parents try is to talk their child into considering the long-term. Talk by itself is often not enough, as most of us dieters know. We need some symbol of the long-range goal right now—a reminder that we are making progress. A daily chart with marks for successes, a record book or diary. Children may need something more concrete such as stickers, buttons, badges or treats. If those little encouragements are given some respect, they can have an effect on the present behavior. Isn't that what compliments from the boss, new titles or privileges at work, promotions, and badges in the military are all about?

Many reactions in the here-and-now are not contrived tokens, badges, or promotions. They simply come from people on the lookout for opportunities to compliment and praise good habits. It's not an easy task to be so observing and responsive, but those that do it have a good effect. We all know how our morale is elevated by bosses who are positive and supporting and deflated by ones who only react to mistakes. **When work and chores are only done for a long-term benefit, someone needs to put in the short-term encouragements that keep up the good effort!**

Making Plans for Non-Behaviors

Be careful when trying to arrange plans and consequences for non-behaviors. Rules that say, *"If you don't do such and such* (watch too much TV, act too shy, walk on the flowers, hit your sister) *I'll reward you"* are difficult to carry out. The time of the promised reaction may be too arbitrary. When does not watching too much TV happen? Better to build your rule around the alternative to TV—something that happens at a particular time and gives you an opportunity to support your son or daughter at a particular moment, *"You're working on your picture, it's looking really good!"*

The non-behavior rule not only fails the specific time test, it also fails to tell the child exactly what to do. In the following example of Maria, a positive rule works best. Maria is too possessive and refuses to share things, and she is often reprimanded for her selfish behavior. We need a rule for Maria that encourages her when she does any little bit of sharing, and we need to resist the temptation of building a rule around the reactions of other children to the non-sharing. Such a rule about selfishness will be a negative (as long as the rule emphasizes bad behavior) or the rule will try to use a positive parental reaction for the non-behavior, but without a specific moment for reaction, the plan has no prospect for success.

The solution to the non-behavior complaint can be reached by searching for what the child should be doing. "Karen watches too much TV" needs to explore what Karen should do. Karen's parents would be at a loss to keep her busy every moment but it is a situation where the extent of TV is the problem and Karen's parents could plan some encouragement for a few alternatives to the tube.

Does this mean that Karen's parents should load up on toys, candy, and money to lure Karen away from TV? Probably not. Most parents have found these rewards to have temporary effects—except in the case of money which will become a bigger part of Karen's life soon enough without using it here.

For problems such as Karen's we need to look around for something useful that we might encourage that would have the additional advantage of making Karen feel a little more impor-

tant as well. It could even be some of the drudgery of life. How about dusting, setting the table, cooking, sweeping, cleaning, or painting. Painting? "But she won't do it right!" you might say. "She'll mess it up. Cooking? That must be a joke."

Of course it's true that you could do any of these tasks better than your child. To get it done right, do it yourself. But the purpose here is not just the job itself, it's the self esteem, the learning, and the alternative to TV. How well the job is done is not a priority. Now don't forget to plan the consequences, your time and positive attention, and maybe a concrete reward.

Don't forget to plan the consequences: your time and positive attention, and maybe a concrete reward.

Chapter 4

Messages that Create the Family Atmosphere

Everyone contributes to the family atmosphere. Each person follows the lead of the others modeling, imitating, and reacting in a manner appropriate to past experience. Respectful, loving parental reactions are copied by the children in their responses back to the parents and on to others. The social habits of the children and the parents recycle through the family, creating a general family atmosphere as these habits are repeated.

Sending the Right Messages

Before we move on to the general philosophy of how to make rules, let's examine what general philosophies are already at work shaping the family atmosphere.

How easily and how frequently do you react to your children?

Everyone has seen parents who are always riding their children. *"Blow your nose," "Tuck in your shirt," "Don't touch,"* and so on. On the other hand, we have all seen parents who never react and let their children run wild with no consideration for others or other's property. Both extremes lead to

problems. Where is the best middle ground? The answer here is in the nature of all of these little corrections.

Parents who offer frequent but positive messages in reacting to their children usually have a positive, and less frantic, family situation. **A father who tends to support, encourage, agree with, and reward or compliment frequently is much more influential and closer to his children than Dad, the critic.** Yet limits and requirements are necessary because every child continually explores limits and if there are none, behavior quickly gets out of hand.

Messages About Loving—a Person, About Liking—a Behavior

Of course you love your children, but here's a similar question that might take a little more time to answer. Do you like them? Love is a general feeling not expressed every moment. Liking is expressed by each of your reactions to what the children do, and they are always doing something! So the message about liking is updated frequently in reactions to everyday behaviors.

Because loving is not expressed as often, messages about how you love your children are greatly outnumbered by messages about how you like them. It's important to be sure that the frequent reactions are sending the right messages.

Mom: *Leave Baby Mark alone, Charles.*
Charles: *I was just going to pat him.*

Mom: *I know what you were going to do. Now just stay away, you'll wake him!*

Mom: *I like to pat him, too. But it will just wake him up and he's tired.*

Charles drops his jelly sandwich

Mom: *You are so messy! Look what you did!*

Mom: *Oh, look what happened! Better pick it up and get a towel.*

If Mom chooses the comments on the left, she emphasizes Charles, the person. You will wake him, you are messy. If she chooses the comments to the right, she emphasizes a third thing that she and Charles are dealing with together. It will wake him. Look what happened. **It won't make a lot of difference to Charles on this one occasion. But over the long haul, Charles ends up with a different message.**

Parents who offer frequent <u>but positive</u> messages in reacting to their children usually have a positive, and less frantic, family situation.

Jovial and approachable people seem to have a rule that says, *"When in doubt, reward. Hardly ever punish."* To the extent that they must correct, contradict, reprimand, and punish, they do so at the cost of losing this friendly air. **This can be one reason some growing daughters and sons often become alienated from family and would rather go outside with friends or stay in their own rooms. It's the likelihood of criticism, "put downs," and corrections that drives them away—just as it does <u>adults</u>.**

Mom and her closest friend:

"John, sometimes I wonder if you really like me, you criticize me so much!"

"Honey, I <u>love</u> you!" You know that."

"That's different. It doesn't make up much of my day."

"What? You want gush and mushy stuff all the time?"

"No, I just want the benefit of the doubt. I want someone on the lookout for my good points and my successes. I've already got plenty of critics in my world!"

"You have <u>plenty</u> of good points."

"Could you point them out more?"

Praise, encouragements, and genuine friendliness are no doubt the most effective influence adults have. And they are the same good influences parents have on their children! When these reactions are used consistently in a direct way for particular behaviors we get results. **It cannot be emphasized enough how much your positive attention influences your children.**

Your reactions do make the difference.

Children engage in a conspiracy—almost unconsciously —to have you believe you are having no effect. They don't have the insight to have conversations like the one above between Mom and her best friend.

But don't be misled. It may not show up in the short run, but your reactions do make the difference. Don't give up. Watch a certain behavior for a few weeks to test your influence and notice how upset they get when they feel ignored! Attention, praise, and general encouragement are handy rewards. They can be used often.

Your child attracts your attention easily—for good or bad behavior. Therefore, when watching a certain behavior, it is important to control which behaviors should attract your attention and which should not.

Selection of behaviors to attract positive attention is the main business of being a parent. Use your good sense and the exercises in this book to keep your attention on the "catch 'em being good" message. Your habit will be contagious and the whole family atmosphere will be more positive.

If looking for mistakes becomes the routine, it puts parents on the road to a habit of correction, reprimand and punishment from almost the very beginning. They become unpleasant when doing the parenting job and don't like themselves when they are doing it. The children will respond in kind and avoid the family situation when possible.

As adults, we have the other option of leaving the relationship. **Yet how difficult it is to leave someone you love because you don't like them. And how difficult it is to leave someone who loves you even though they don't like you.**

Models They Live By: Creating a Disposition

A child's most common reaction to the problems of everyday experiences will probably be an imitation of people he or she lives with at home and in school. Children imitate styles of adults more often than specific adult behaviors. Attitudes toward others, conversational style and temperament are the durable characteristics of teachers and parents that are copied. The result is a general disposition made up of habits and styles of encouragement and punishment of others. **A child can easily acquire a disposition almost entirely from the family air!**

The disposition to punish and correct others can be learned just as easily as the disposition to encourage others. But to learn to police your disposition is a difficult task. There are no planned consequences for you as an adult, and adults change by practice with encouragements just as children do. So whether or not anything can be done about the dispositions in your home depends on the answer to the question *"Can this mother and father plan to control a little of each other's behavior through some feedback?"*

The positive approach emphasizes reward—not necessarily material ones, but approval, smiling, etc. It's a more pleasant job for you as a parent and leaves you with a child who is still informative, friendly, responsive, and not always wanting to go somewhere else!

Attitudes toward others, conversational style and temperament are the durable characteristics of teachers and parents that are copied.

The choice between rewards and punishments will be taken up in detail in Chapter 8 and 9, but in most cases the odds favor reward. **Punishment shows that out of all the responses the child could have made, the child has chosen the wrong one—try again. Little information is available to him in that.**

A positive reaction is much more efficient because it says that out of all the things he could have done, this is one of the right ones. A rewarding reaction is more difficult for parents to come up with, however, because you must take time to decide what you want to reward and what comment or material thing to use as reward. **We're likely to already know**

what we want to punish and how we would do it.

If you are a single parent, it may be all the more difficult to say to yourself, as a spouse might: *"Don't let me pick on the kids; stop me and point out my good reactions."* Chapter 15 takes up this and other problems of going it alone.

The disposition of the family can also be influenced by making plans about the small everyday social behaviors of kids.

The disposition of the family can also be influenced by making plans about the small everyday social behaviors of kids. Many parents have developed a poor disposition in their child by not planning the limits of their demands as carefully as they plan the limits on the kids. For example, in what situations will the child be on his own? A child makes so many mistakes, there are so many things we want him to do right, and so many things he can do wrong that it's easy to react too much.

Without planning, parents feel that they have to be after the kids constantly and one parent may complain to the other, *"Why can't you just leave him (her) alone?"* The answer is that, without a plan, a Mom or a Dad can not be sure what is right and wrong and if they're always looking for the problems, they can't leave him alone.

Where Does Disposition Come From?

"Isn't it amazing how mother and daughter are alike!" said Ms. Jones. *"That woman reading at the end of the back row just has to be Regina's mother. Regina even reads at lunch time!"*

"Yes, it's unbelievable," whispered Ms. Miller. *"And I would recognize Bobby Connie's father anywhere. His attempt at a little joke. And Lisa Sour's father sulking while he waits for the meeting. You wouldn't believe such details could be inherited!"*

Ms. Jones and Ms. Miller were teachers at PTA back-to-school night. They told me that when they were waiting for the meeting to start, they played a "Match the Parents Game." It's been their favorite for years and they find their guesses to be very accurate. Their success with matching parents and students comes, in part, from physical similarities that are inher-

ited, but the way the students act is, in part, a copy of their parents' style. It's a hint the teachers find very useful in their game. How talkative, pleasant, sarcastic, or happy each parent and student is, helps the teachers make their matches.

A Disposition Creates Its Own Surroundings

When children imitate bad dispositions, they must use threats in a subtle way because children are less powerful than adults. Fighting back, a child puts off her parents or teacher and reduces their requests for work. As an example of this temptation, consider Lisa. At 8, Lisa has developed a "negative attitude." Most of the time she is cynical and pessimistic. You can imagine that it is easy to feel uncomfortable or aggravated around her. At home with her own family, Lisa receives a bit more attention but the aggravation and frustration that others feel usually shows through.

Mom: *"How was school today, Lisa?"*
Lisa: *"O.K."*
Mom: *"Well, tell me about it!"*
Lisa: *"Do you have to know everything?"*
Mom: *"I was just interested."*
Lisa: *"Just leave me alone."*

Lisa is a non-rewarder. She acts selfishly, thinking little of others and asking little of them. She's no trouble, but somehow she's still troublesome. **She brings out the worst in others and then reacts to that by getting worse herself. The circle continues. To break the circle, someone will have to be big enough to not play the game. That requires love, because it means performing good social behavior with no support from Lisa**, possibly with punishment from her instead.

Lisa herself might grow enough to be the "someone" who will break the circle someday. However, in the short run, it's not likely that anyone will spontaneously change. The most likely adjustment Lisa will make is to *"give them back what they give you."* If they give you bad behavior, let them taste their own medicine! Punishment for punishment, silence for

silence, or even, silence for punishment (they won't get anything out of me!)

Lisa may extend her use of punishment and later, learn to use warnings of punishments to coerce teacher or parent. If demands are not met, she increases the intensity of the demand, and then she tries further punishment—possibly a tantrum. It's coercion.

Adults may learn to avoid "all this" by giving in early. Giving in serves as reward to Lisa, but it also rewards the adults because they successfully avoid Lisa's escalating tantrum. **It is a common parent-child relationship where the child's bad behavior is rewarded by attaining undeserved privileges and avoiding work, and the parent's "giving in" is rewarded by successfully avoiding the threat of more bad behavior.** It's a case of negative reinforcement (see Chapter 7) for parents and positive reinforcement for Lisa.

In order to have an effect on Lisa, adults need to present a different impression than Lisa does, one with a more positive disposition.

A Checklist to Guard a Positive Disposition

1. How many positive remarks do I make to my kids each day?
2. Am I modeling good social skills and tolerance?
3. Do my rules create an atmosphere I enjoy?
4. How many rules can I have and still maintain a pleasant atmosphere?
5. Could I reduce the rules that require policing and enforcement?

A poor parental disposition is almost always the result of a lack of planning about what is important enough to reward and what bad behaviors are trivial enough to ignore.

My experience with six-year-old Harry may be familiar to many parents. Harry came into our office waiting room first and sat on a convenient chair, the mother chose to sit at the opposite side of the seating area. *"Sit over here,"* she said. He moved to the seat next to her. *"Don't swing your foot like*

that!" Harry picked up a magazine from the table. *"Be careful with that,"* she said. He turned a page noisily. *"Shh, I told you to be careful!"*

As it turned out, one of the complaints from both teachers and Mom was that Harry was bossy and constantly critical of others. Mom had developed low expectations and low tolerance and it was contagious. In turn, Harry developed his critical habits.

Dispositions Reserved for Children

An interesting aspect of a parental disposition such as the one displayed by Harry's mother is that generally a parent uses it only with the child. Parents do not ordinarily act in this punitive way with other adults. Rather, they come to expect something different from children and nag about the slightest deviation from the expectations. But often the expectations themselves have never been thoughtfully worked out! **What at first appears to be a high standard of behavior by Harry's mother turns out to be actually no specific standard at all.** So a parent in such a situation punishes nearly everything and finds no opportunity to reward good behavior.

What is expected of us, and what we expect, creates the social atmosphere in which we live.

One teacher I talked to was surprised that Harry was having problems. *"I know he can be difficult but I have decided to catch him doing well. I focus on finding his good moments and when I find one, I let him know it. I think he knows I'm giving him a chance and that I like him."*

Adults expect the same of us, more tolerance, more chances to make amends for mistakes, and we show them a better disposition. What is expected of us, and what we expect, creates the social atmosphere in which we live. The adult rule is, **"Don't correct or reprimand until a mistake has been made—certainly withhold punishment, it creates bad feelings."** Here's one reason the atmosphere is better in the teachers' coffee room than in the hallway.

Another teacher I know said that as she went down the school hallway, she noticed classes reacting to their teachers in

Give a nice day.

ways that were "typical" of each teacher's classes. She was surprised that the students could make such quick adjustments as they went from Math to Art to Gym, creating a recognizable atmosphere in each place. From a selfish point of view, if you were a teacher how would you like to spend your day? With people who are modeling positive behavior or people who are modeling a punishing disposition?

So how shall we encourage? **No doubt the most effective reward we use is verbal praise and encouragement.** When this praise is consistently used in an obvious manner for a particular behavior, results are gratifying. An additional improvement comes when the attitude is imitated. Some parents and teachers may devalue the effect of their attention because they observe only an immediate target behavior. In the longer view however, a child's disposition will become a close copy of the surrounding adult attitudes.

Give a nice day.

Routine Strategies, Routine Results

The problem illustrated by Harry's mother waiting for counseling is almost always the result of a lack of planning and attention to parental reactions. The critical part of planning that is left out is determining which behaviors are important and which are trivial. Had Mom ever thought about whether Harry should always sit next to her? She said she had not. Why had she corrected him to do so? She said she was afraid he *"might do something wrong over there."* She said she had no specific fear he would do anything wrong, she just didn't trust him. Some boys might deserve such distrust, but for Harry it was just habit with a little reprimand thrown in. **A psychological leash had been put on, and it was jerked regularly.**

To break the habit of the psychological leash a good rule to include in strategies is, *"Don't correct or instruct your child until you are certain a mistake is being made."* This is the rule that all adults expect you to apply to them, and your children deserve the same treatment until they prove otherwise. Mom (and Dad) should train herself to hesitate before reprimanding, correcting or discouraging a behavior that is not worth the bad feeling.

The leash is worth breaking for additional reasons. Corrections that are intended as reprimands may become rewards over a long time. They replace the child's responsibility. He just does what he wants while he depends on his parent to make all the corrections. **So while striving for perfection, total dependence is achieved!** And the corrections may come to function as rewards because they are attention. In addition, a disposition is still being learned, of course, and the child may learn the habit of nagging as well. He or she may bring up certain questions continually and may harp on them often.

Shea: *"But Mommy, why can't I walk to the movies alone?"*
Mom: *"I already told you why, Shea."*
Shea: *"I know, but can't I, pleeease!"*
Mom: *"No."*

The next day it starts all over again.

Shea: *"Mommy, Mary wants me to walk to the movies with her. Can I go?"*

What events maintain Shea's behavior? The topic always brings up disagreement and punishment, but she always brings it up. The first and most likely reason for this running battle is that Mom and Dad have never held a brief planning session about the problem. Without this strategy session, the reasons given to Shea change from time to time, her parents disagree from time to time, and they lose confidence in these decisions from time to time. **The inconsistency encourages Shea to keep trying because one day she thinks she might hit the right combination of attitudes and get to go. She probably will.**

The planning session would nail down the reasons, pinpoint the agreement between Shea's parents and give them confidence. It would help by stating the honest reasons for the decisions in detail.

Mom: *"Your father and I have decided you can't walk to the movies alone. We think bigger people might bother you and make trouble for you along the way and while you're there. When you are ten you may do it. Right, David?"*

Dad: *"Right."*

Now will she stop nagging? Probably not, but the amount of nagging will decrease, and Shea will be a little happier because the situation is now clear, honest, and fair — at least Shea's parents think so and it gives them confidence. For Shea, the structure makes the situation more comfortable than the continual argument, although it's still not what she wants. Shea's argumentive behavior will mellow because the statement of the rule is concrete and detailed — not much room for loopholes.

A good disposition, then, begins with imitation. It is maintained by experience with reliable rules that produce opportunities for parents to support good social and emotional habits.

As the air clears a little, Shea's parents need to stay alert and make a special effort to engage and encourage her. They don't want this vacuum to fill with some other unwanted attention-getting behavior.

A good disposition then, begins with imitation. It is maintained by experience with reliable rules that produce opportunities for parents to support good social and emotional habits. Parents need not be forced into the unpleasant task of looking only for the bad mistakes and administering the reprimand or punishment. This is not good for parent morale. And it's not good for the child's morale either. By reducing the overall amount of behavior, it also reduces risk taking by the child and, therefore, reduces learning.

In this way, two general characteristics of love, friendship and a good relationship, are violated: the child is not given the benefit of the doubt and the child's growth is kept in check by the threat. As Chapter 8 will show, **it is often the good behavior that is reduced by frequent punishment—even mild punishment.** Chapter 9 will take up many alternatives to

punishment that adults can live with and children should be blessed with.

Included under punishment is much more than physical punishment. Reprimands, scoldings, and sarcastic comments designed to reduce bad behavior in children are included along with "left-handed" compliments—punishments disguised as rewards. "*That's certainly a big improvement over yesterday!*" or "*That's very good considering...*"

These statements with double, good and bad, meanings should be watched carefully.

Children are less capable of sorting out the subtle meaning and are likely to only get the overall message that they are still wrong. When a child is right, send a clear, positive message without complicated verbal decorations.

Chapter 5

Messages About How You Treat Your Children

Each of us needs a few simple guiding principles to keep us on course each day so that our rules for our children provide the right messages to them and the right impression to others about how we want our children to be treated. Rules are easy to make, but promises are hard to keep, and threats are hard to carry out. With too many rules you may feel you only police your children, but without rules, moment-to-moment reactions go off in scattered directions seeking one goal and then another.

Rules are easy to make, but promises are hard to keep, and threats are hard to carry out.

The chapters of Part 3 will take up the pros and cons of many types of rules. In preparation for those selections, this chapter and the following exercise will help you relate your present priorities to the goal of raising a competent adult.

The resulting rules will not be dramatic ones, they will be guidelines for everyday actions. **Bold strokes that suddenly "get through to" a child seldom accomplish the desired result.** What the child comes to expect as a result of consistent experiences make up the long-lasting behavior patterns

How Will Others Treat Your Children?

Most people will not treat your children any better than you do! Friends and relatives note how you treat your children, and they will tend to give them the same respect and have the same expectations as you do.

Other adults will also react to the collection of skills, presumptions, and attitudes your children have acquired from you. Your expectations included your parents' attitudes which helped set your self-concept and influenced what you expect from your children and others.

You will pass along your self-concept and your assumptions about your children and, from that, they will develop an expectation about how others will perceive them. It becomes a self-fulfilling expectation because they take with them a whole pattern of attitudes, assumptions, and habits that will tend to recreate, in new acquaintances, the same experiences they left behind.

Most people will not treat your children any better than you do!

Most people won't treat your children any worse than you do, either! People model each other and their reactions tend to create their surroundings. **Each of us causes some people to fade away and others to draw closer. We feather our own social nest.** Children will pick up your model of how you treat each person. They will pick up your attitude, disposition, and the nature of your appetite for life. Then they are off to recreate their own social environment by reacting to those around them, presenting a certain model, and selecting, without much attention, people who confirm their expectations.

The business of parenting is to "handle" the children and influence their habits, but, in addition, those lessons, taken together, also teach children what to expect of themselves and how they should "handle" others. **So your children learn from your social style and the life philosophy it represents. They learn by imitation and by the way you handle problems in the family. They also learn an attitude toward themselves.**

Theories and Explanations

For many years child psychologists have searched for solutions to the problems of parenthood. Their searches have usually focused on the reasons children do the things they do—in their reactions to parents, to siblings and friends, and to school. If we only knew the reasons, we would know what to do. The solutions would make life easier and we could enjoy parenting more. **But solutions have been difficult to come by because they seem buried in a maze of complicated answers** concerning the genes children inherit, the importance of early experiences they have had, and the recent treatment they have encountered from parents and others.

Parents cannot afford the common craziness of doing the same thing over and over and expecting to produce a magical new result!

Explanations and theories may vividly describe a possible explanation of child behavior and may help you understand the situation. That will be helpful in thinking about the problem in a calm and loving way. However, the purpose of this book is to go beyond the theories to help parents find practical strategies for action at the moments when problems come up.

Parents cannot afford the common craziness of doing the same thing over and over and expecting to produce a magical new result! Instead, we could try a new reaction to such general characteristics as moodiness based on an analysis of the events that make it happen and the reactions that a child gets for "moodiness." That is, what happens next? **To enjoy successful parenting, the search for solutions should always return to a concern for the question, "What happens next?"**

Concentrating on behaviors and their consequences allows us to discover how to use our behaviors to change the behavior of others. The more recognizable the activity is, the more consistent the reactions to it can be and therefore the more consistent the child's experience and learning. For example, parents can easily agree on when their child is attempting to walk and thus when to help with the task. A behavioral description here is easy (whenever she stands up and moves her feet around). Parents usually agree on when to encourage the

walker and she learns the task quickly.

Parents often disagree, however, about whether a child is angry, wants attention, or is tired. Often, even a single parent cannot decide how to interpret these moods. How do you react to a moody child who seems "angry"? If a father wants the homework done he might decide that an angry child is really just a procrastinating child. A mother trying to get a child off to bed might decide that "angry" is really "tired."

Dad: *Allen sure gives us a lot of trouble at dinner.*

Mom: *It's just that he's tired.*

Dad: *He's just set on ruining it for everyone, I think.*

Mom: *It's a bad age.*

Dad: *Well, bad age or not, I'm tired of it.*

Mom: *What do you want to do, have him eat by himself?*

Dad: *No, but we should do something. I'm willing to have dinner a little earlier, if that will help, but I think if he messes up his food, we should take it away and give him just the one thing he's eating. If he's not eating anything, we should take it away and tell him to ask if he wants anything; what do you think?*

Mom: *OK, but I think our rule should include his yelling and trying to get down as well as messing up his food. And I think after we take the food away we should wait, say two minutes, before we should give him the one food he has been eating, if there is one.*

Dad: *OK, let's try it, at least we'll both be using the same rule.*

Setting Out Long-Term Goals

In The Gesell Institute's *Child Behavior* you are advised to *"try to provide, so far as you can, the kind of situation in which each kind of child can feel comfortable and can do well. But don't try to change him or make him over."*

The advice is good except you are not yet told what the "kind of situation" is. Also the caution of not trying to make your child over is a little confusing since we are working for some change. Just how far can we go and not be accused of "making him over?"

Ideally, child-rearing should be a process of gradually expanding responsibility and independence.

This chapter explores the kinds of situations that will produce improvement. Part 3 discusses how to keep the rules down to few simple ones, and Part 4 will focus on helping your child get along with others. **The ultimate goal is, of course, for the child to be independent and competent. Child-rearing is really adult-rearing in the long run!**

The way in which a child grows to the independence and competency of adulthood varies from family to family and we all know that the extent of success varies also. **We could probably agree that, ideally, child-rearing should be a process of gradually expanding responsibility and independence.** Unfortunately we have all seen many families where the children go through a long period of severe limits followed by an abrupt and risky freedom at about the age of 17 or 18 when the American teenager is sprung from the nest to go to college or work.

Mom: *I need some help with dinner every night. Neal, could you set the table for everyone each night?*

Neal (age 5) *Do I hafta? Make Dawn do it.*

Mom: *No, since she turned 9, Dawn makes the whole dinner on Tuesdays and lunch on Saturday; you just set the table.*

Neal: *I'd rather make a meal like Dawn.*

Mom: *OK. Let's work on a few meals together.*

maybe we could start tomorrow night. For now, just set the table, that will be a great help!

I am sure Neal isn't completely happy with this new chore, but with the proper appreciation, he will have an additional feeling of worth and ability. Dawn is learning she can take care of herself and Neal needs to learn the same. While living at home many children experience very little practice with real life responsibilities. **Once away from home our offspring will have to learn quickly about getting along with people who are not loving parents, about how to make meals, about car payments and checking accounts, and about leaving time to enjoy life without being lazy. We had better get started now teaching some of those things.**

Coping well with the demands of bank accounts, budget management, and the need to plan a future beyond the end of the month requires a great deal of practice at the younger ages.

Most children-turned-teenagers grow up late, painfully, and abruptly, but they grow up. Unfortunately, the newspapers tell us about many young adults who do not cope well with their sudden plunge into independence. As a result, many "children" come back home to live a few more years in the nest—not always a welcome idea to parents.

Mom: *Neal* (age 12, now), *maybe you could balance the checkbook each month this summer.*

Neal: *What? I don't know anything about that!*

Mom: *Well, now's the time to come and learn. Maybe you should earn a "service charge" for the job.*

Neal: *I'll try. But don't get mad if I get it wrong.*

Neal will never ask why he needs to learn decimals in school. He already knows. Coping well with the demands of bank accounts, budget management, and the need to plan a future beyond the end of the month requires a great deal of practice at the younger ages. While parents usually talk to their

offspring about the demands of the outside world, it is easy to forget to allow practice with as much of the reality as possible.

As soon as reasonable, children need experience with the freedom to make decisions on their own and reap the consequences of those decisions. **When they are successful, the protection of the family nest can make sure that the success is recognized and encouraged. The failures can be learning experiences with the consequences softened by the parents if necessary. A long period of safe trial and error is possible for children whose parents allow for it.**

For Parents, When Is "Doing Nothing" a Good Reaction?

If Jimmy (age 3) has tantrums and Mom lets Jimmy cry it out, she may find the course unusually difficult for the first few tantrums. Jimmy feels he needs more attention and continues to look for ways to get it. Withholding attention from the tantrums puts more pressure on Jimmy. Tantrums provided Jimmy with a way to his portion of consideration, but it no longer works. Without more planning, attention will be harder to come by—a circumstance that produced the problem in the first place! Mom will need a plan to attend Jimmy not just more—but for some particularly acceptable behaviors.

Kim was part of a family I worked with. She was a fourth-grader who took up to four hours each night to complete the small amount of homework she was assigned. It was usually about a half-hour's work, but Kim continually prolonged her work. She had to get another pencil, go to the bathroom again (trip number three), get another paper, start over, etc. To understand the problem, the question, "Why?" has to again be reworded to, "What happens next?" What result does Kim get for losing her place, and then finding her place or deciding to start over because of a small smudge on the paper? It's tempting to say she's particular or she is a perfectionist, and this might be true. But **before we decide that the problem is inside Kim, let's look at the results of this behavior, not at**

A long period of safe trial and error is possible for children whose parents allow for it.

school, but right there where they happen.

The immediate result of Kim's behavior turned out to be the prolonged attention of an exasperated mother intent on Kim finishing the work. When I asked, *"What would happen if Kim suddenly finished quickly?"* Mom said, *"That's happened! And I had dinner ready on time that night!"* If Kim did her work efficiently, Mom was gone in a flash to the kitchen. But if homework took a long time, Mom stayed around.

The solution to Kim's problem may seem easy at first. Just do nothing—remove attention for all this procrastination. But Kim is working (or performing "non-working") for Mom's attention and it would be wrong to ignore that need and *"do nothing."* Kim needs an acceptable way to be heard, attended, and considered in the family. **One danger with Kim becoming a good performer is that Mom will be tempted to focus on problems of other siblings if Kim is "OK."**

So the discovery that Kim is procrastinating for Mom's attention required more than a plan for restricting Mom's attention. Mom's new strategy was to give Kim help from 4:00 to 4:30 each afternoon for homework, then Mom did other things.

After dinner, time was reserved for Kim to talk with Mom or Dad and do other activities but not homework. At first, there were problems because Kim was still on homework after dinner, but after a week the family evenings had improved. Homework time dropped from four inefficient hours to 45 minutes of productive work.

In addition, Mom remained alert to other possible activities of Kim that deserved more attention. Kim started helping with dinner and Mom showed her appreciation. Merely removing attention from Kim was not the aim of the strategy. The *"do nothing"* strategy was actually a plan to look for more possibilities for attention to Kim. Completion of homework was still on the list but help with dinner and other evening activities made up a more balanced and healthier list.

For Children, "Do Nothing" is Not a Good Idea

It's the child's view of the adequacy of attention that is determining the need for it. **Parents may feel they give adequate attention and may be correct by objective standards, but the child may still feel a need because of the nature of the attention or the timing of it, or because of what he or she has to do to get it.**

Lack of enough activity is another condition that is even harder to recognize and even more troublesome. It usually leads to being a little depressed. A child does not easily know how to entertain himself, and parents often think he will naturally find what he wants to do if he's told, *"Go find something to do."*

Jerry (7-year-old) *"What a boring day!"*
Dad: *"Lousy weather."*
Jerry: *"Yeah. It's too cold to do anything outside."*
Dad: *"Let's draw a plan of the garden."*
Jerry: *"We don't need a plan now, that's way off."*
Dad: *"We could split it up, and you can have a part for your own. Like this ... "*

Jerry's ability to busy himself got a little help from Dad today. He's not happy and bubbly about it, but the boredom will give way because Dad not only has an activity but he is letting Jerry into it as an independent partner. Jerry now has part of the garden.

Grumpy, bored, or depressed children can often improve if only they have some place to spend some energy. Adults learn this remedy for the blues—exercise, chores, and projects help a great deal. **Children often feel only an exciting and new activity will help—something wild like the experiences they see on TV.** Most of us adults know that the remedy doesn't have to be that wild, and it's a good thing, since the "wild things" are rare. Dad will have to illustrate this advice many times as Jerry picks up the habit.

Reactions to Not Enough Attention

A hit-or-miss approach to entertainment has additional problems beyond depression. **There's nothing more dangerous than human beings with too much time on their hands.** All kings, dictators, army officers, college presidents, and teachers learn this principle early or suffer the consequences.

So again there is a need to plan some incentives for productive activity because if some structuring is not provided for the child who is at lose ends, he will cast about and over the undirected years come up with undesirable habits. How a child entertains himself may be very bothersome if he has no responsibilities to fulfill, no opportunity for useful activity, and no reason to expect any benefit from his choices.

The parental attention here should be on the child's opportunities. It's not necessary to see that she is always busy. Everyone needs a break and everyone has their own pace of living. But on-going responsibilities should be available for even the younger children. Some assigned chores, for example, provide something to do, something to be appreciated for, something to be proud of, and something that is a source of self-esteem. Some chores can be assigned (and rewarded) without specifying exactly when they are to be done.

If you have a few jobs that you can do when the mood hits you, then that sudden urge for activity has somewhere to go and may occasionally be productive. Cleaning a room, practicing a musical instrument, vacuuming, working in the yard, and doing long-term homework assignments need support for their own sake as an activity—not just for the result they produce. So parental support even for the unfinished project is important. If possible, leave a few selections of exact times to the child and leave the nagging and badgering out.

The Pursuit of "Perfection"

Every child starts projects that later falter. For example, in practicing on a musical instrument, why would a daughter procrastinate? Why would she keep missing practice by letting the hours go by? It may be time to increase support for smaller

steps. Or you may wish to be content with a less than perfect dedication to the project rather than risk giving attention to the bad behavior.

If the goal of the music lessons is enjoyment of music then the little steps along the way are the ones to encourage; the pursuit of perfection was never the purpose. Has her appreciation of music improved? It's hard to know, all one can do is support the activity and set a good example through interest.

Sometimes children feel an obligation to make you believe you are not having an effect!

Sandra: *These art museums are boring.*

Mom: *Some of these paintings are very famous and very beautiful.*

Sandra: *They're all old pictures of old people.*

Mom: *But look at this one. Can you see how the artist used light and dark to show how the light comes from the candle?*

Sandra: *I could do that.*

Mom: *And look at this one. Look at how some things are made to look far away and some closer.*

Sandra: *They're just smaller.*

Mom: *But they are just the right sizes, and a little less clear.*

Sandra: *I guess.*

Is Sandra getting a new appreciation of art? Be careful in concluding that Sandra's museum trip is a waste of time just because of her attitude. **Sometimes children feel an obligation to make you believe you are not having an effect!** Other behaviors later on, when she encounters other art or tries out her own painting skills again will be a better indication of the usefulness of the museum trip. **Keep your own spirits up on the museum trip and guard against following your child into a gloomy attitude. More may be getting done than either of you observe.**

Regardless of your approach to child-rearing, the question of whether anything has changed in the mind of the child will remain partially unanswered. All parental efforts will seem only partly successful, the children want it that way!

Cures and Changes

All parental efforts will seem only partly successful—the children want it that way!

The idea of a cure also implies that some general change has taken place in the individual. But in the approach here, parents consider a priority of behaviors and problems. With a behavior page from Exercise 1, they can focus on one or two problems, plan some reactions for those and carry them out. For all the other behaviors, you will have to rely on the ordinary sequence of your reactions and the reactions of others. The general cure will have to come from the smaller focus.

For a visit to the doctor, we all hope for a quick and effortless cure, a magic bottle with pills that are easy to take. Changes in child-rearing rarely happen in that quick and easy way. There are no magic bullets. There's only you and your child and what your child does and what you do and later, what the rest of the world does, in return.

The strategies described in this book focus on individual behavior problems. The changes in behavior brought about by these strategies may be relatively permanent, and that permanence can be somewhat ensured by supporting behaviors that you know are likely to be supported by others. For that, you must rely on your ability to observe what results or consequences follow the individual activities that are important to you. Your effort should focus on the small parts of problems and emphasize the repetition of consequences.

Practice implies repetition and, in the context of this book, this means repetition of consequences as well as the behavior.

Exercise and Summary of Part 2

Fill In These Important Lists

What are the behaviors you want?
Which ones are unwanted?
Which behaviors make up "Disposition?"
What priorities would you give to your lists of wanted and unwanted behaviors?

Wanted and Unwanted:

Most of us find it easier to list the potential bad behaviors of our children than to think of the good ones. And the description of bad behaviors tends to be more specific than for the good. *"Don't go in the street"* is specific enough to draw consequences when the child goes in the street. *"Play safe"* is nice, but too vague to draw much attention when the child does it. For a more balanced view, try filling out the table below.

Good Behaviors to Look For	Possible Good Parent Reactions	Bad Behaviors to Discourage	Usual Reactions and Pitfalls
Plays with sister	Comment on their projects together	Yelling in car	Yelling at him, putting him alone in the back
Homework before dinner	Review homework	Teasing sister	Separate them
Shares TV program choices	Show him I noticed	Getting upset about homework	Get after him to start earlier
Helps with dishes	Sing songs, ask about his day	Taking too long to dress	Try to ignore it, then use count-out [as for Brian in Chapter 1.]

***** Keep this table handy in your notebook for sessions when one of these behaviors will be the subject of a new "behavior page" from the Exercises of Part 1.***

"Disposition Behaviors"

How would you describe your child's disposition? Give the evidence. Pretend we are in court. What objective reasons would you give, that the judge would accept, to support your statement that your child is say, "happy" or "moody?"

He's happy when	Reaction?	He's "in a mood" if	Reaction?
Sings to himself	Usually nothing	Torments sister	Separate them
Pleasant to me	Talk to him more	Refuses everything	Argue and demand
Is cooperative	Accept his help	Won't answer until threatened	Threaten

What Priorities Would You Give to Your Lists of Wanted and Unwanted Behaviors?

Viewed at the moment of aggravation, a child can seem to have acquired an unbearable habit. In writing down the complaint and prioritizing it, the description is often more objective. You may understand the problem better even before a planning session begins.

Try to include a behavior page from Exercise 1 if you plan to have a planning session about the problem. Does it usually happen when siblings are around, just before dinner or bedtime, only when things are a bit boring? A little searching for the conditions may give you some new ideas about the reasons for the problem.

What other behaviors of your child also seem to be problems? We don't want to take on everything at once, but diverting your attention to other problems for a moment is helpful in deciding just how this complaint ranks in the larger picture. When the broad view is considered, the complaint might not get at the real problem and you might want to restate it.

The complaint might be too trivial to worry about now. It

doesn't have to be the most important problem in the family, but if it ends up too far down your list of important problems, you might want to choose a better priority.

Rejecting a problem as too unimportant is not wasted time. Some positive action can come of this discovery because often the initial problem was getting attention, reprimands, or nagging. Before moving on to a more important problem, you might want to consider stopping all corrections and comments for this lowly problem. There is always the risk that part of the reason it exists at all is the attention it gets, and anyway the family airways can always use a little cleaning up to make room for more pleasant times. Now the behavior should cause you less irritation because you have put it in its place.

Priority	Desired Behavior	Priority	Unwanted Behavior
1	Get homework done	1	Bad to his sister
2	Leave sister alone	2	Throw fit over homework
3	Do something besides watch TV	3	Starts screaming
4	Help with dishes	4	Refuses to help around house
5	Go out and exercise	5	Watches too much TV
		6	Won't keep his shoes on

PART 3

How to Make a Few Good Rules

Rules for children should teach them useful capabilities so that they know, as soon as they can, that they are growing more capable. After that, they need to know, each day, that they are growing a little more capable.

Chapter 6

Planning Sessions for Reasonable Rules and Strategies

Making time to plan parental strategies is necessary. This may sound devious and scheming but remember how much time and energy your children use for working things out their way, even though they may not be aware of their own intentions as they react and adjust and react again. With the advantage of time available for planning and time for trying out solutions over and over, it's possible children will gain too much control of the family activity. ***Occasional planning sessions can keep the balance and fairness in family relationships.***

Holding to Reasonable Rules

Very young children learn the first few skills quickly because they find natural gratification in many of the behaviors required. When you are 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, it's feels good to succeed in dressing yourself, tying your own shoe, or in overpowering and using a spoon. **In these cases the obvious usefulness of the task is a great advantage to the teaching parent.**

But how quickly the obvious worth of the task becomes debatable! After mastering the spoon, the next lesson is table manners. After successful dressing, the next lesson is proper selection and care of clothes. Now the parents must examine the reasoning behind their rules, and they are challenged to defend the reasoning. Arbitrary requests can put parents in the uncomfortable position of defending their own values in a small argument with a small person, but it is an ominous preview of the confrontations to come in the next 15 to 20 years.

Working out a justification can be more than a defense, it can be a review that will lead us to stop using rules no longer needed.

Of course, all parents from time to time neglect working out the reasons for the requests they make of their children. When surprised, they find themselves rationalizing in a desperate attempt to protect their authority and quell a childish rebellion. **Working out a justification can be more than a defense, it can be a review that will lead us to stop using rules no longer needed.** Out of habit we may continue to react and control behavior in an area where independence should replace inconvenient and unpleasant control.

Sometimes when the child is given a chore, a procrastination game can develop when parents provide occasional attention. Parents may nag, plead, and prod the child along in the chore all the time worrying that the "game" is being prolonged for the child's entertainment. **When parents feel reduced to these unpleasant behaviors, it's tempting to blame the child not only for failure in the task, but for making Mom and Dad unhappy with themselves.** It's time to pause for a parent planning session to look for a new strategy. Some of the following conclusions and strategies might be good starting points for such conferences.

Possible Alternatives to Consider in the Planning Session

1. **The behavior is too trivial to bother with.** Let's ignore it and eliminate a lot of unpleasant nagging and make more time for other kinds of conversation. This might apply to the way a child combs his/her hair, posture while watching TV, the few scraps of food always left on the dinner plate.

2. **The justification is off in the future.** When she/he starts noticing the impression others get from messy hair, sloppy posture, or wasteful habits, then we'll see a change. Let's wait for the expansion of his/her social circle to do it. Right now we can avoid sacrificing our family atmosphere.

3. **The behavior is worth changing.** Let's think up a consequence that could work and stop all the nagging. From now on, anyone in the family showing terrible posture or wasting food has to put a penny in a jar on the kitchen table. Anyone completing a day without having to put in a penny may take ten cents from the jar (Mom or Dad pay off if the jar is empty).

4. **The behavior really is worth changing, and it hasn't changed because they know they're getting through to us.** There is a reward already working, it's the very nagging and pleading that we thought would solve the problem! It's time to pay close attention to ignoring this bad habit and looking for any time we can encourage little glimmers of good behavior that we hope will replace it.

Mom: *Let's all be in the clean plate club tonight!*
Carlos: *I hate green stuff.*
Maria: *Me too!*
Mom: *It's all good for you. Now eat up. I try hard to...*
Maria: *I'll take one bite* (she spoons up just enough to show up on a laboratory slide)
Mom: *You too, Carlos.*
Carlos: *This is ridiculous.*
Mom: *Now Carlos, we have cookies for after.*
Carlos: *I don't even like cookies.*
Mom: *You know you like cookies .....*

Later, in the planning session blame sets in

Dad: *That was a good dinner, but eating it was miserable!*

Mom: *Well, that's the way kids are, you know. I can't force them to eat.*

Dad: *Carlos just does it to argue, and then they both eat what they want later. It's an attention-getting thing.*

Mom: *It's their way of getting the conversation to be about them.*

Dad: *Maybe we should eat later, alone.*

Mom: *That's a solution for us, but it won't make them eat any better. How about this idea: if you back me up on "no snacks," I'll just put out what we all should eat and that's it! They won't starve, they'll eat some of it, and maybe we can talk about something besides food at dinner.*

Dad: *They'll whine for other stuff. We'll just have to ignore that.*

Mom: *We tell them once that this is what we are having for dinner – that's it. I just won't have other stuff in the house. It won't always be convenient, but it's better than all this fighting to get them to eat.*

Dad: *Carlos will gripe all the way through dinner.*

Mom: *We just have to bring up other topics like we would with visitors. He'll gripe at first but if we stick to it, he'll get used to eating what he wants of what is there. Just don't buy into the I'll-bet-you-can't-make-me-eat game.*

Dad: *Me!? You're the one who...*

Mom: *OK, OK, never mind that, we have to be together on this. Remember we agreed to*

support each other in these sessions, not to go after each other.

Dad: *Ok. Let's try it. As long as they're not sick, let them pick what they want from what we serve.*

Mom: *Just remember to bring in other subjects that they can be in on.*

Dad: *And if it doesn't work we can always have another planning session.*

The strategy planned here may need some modification later and Mom and Dad will certainly need another session on other problems. **The advantage of the session is that Mom and Dad are trying out a new way of handling a problem—not just reacting to each moment as it comes up—and, they feel they are in control of what's going on.**

5. **The behavior is worth changing, not so much for reasons that benefit the child but because we would find it more pleasant and comfortable that way.** It's not for the child's sake, it is for ours that we start the penny-jar procedure, or the plan to ignore the bad behavior or the goal of looking for the good behavior to encourage. This may seem selfish but it can be valid. **There's a time for selfishness in parenting:**

Jerry: *"Mom, why can't I stay out late and play every night? How can I get hurt in my own yard on some nights and not others? It doesn't make sense!"*

Mom: *"Well, on most of those nights you need the extra time for homework."*

Jerry: *"If I have my homework done, can I stay out?"*

Mom: *"You also need to rest sometimes."*

Jerry: *"Can I watch TV?"*

Mom: *"Well, I, ah, really meant for you to rest."*

Sometimes the real justification for this kind of rule is that the parents want some evenings when they can have peace of mind and won't have to worry about possible accidents and what's going on out there.

Mom: *"I want you here with us some nights because I don't want to worry every evening."* This frank statement of parents' rights might not end the argument but at least Mom can feel more comfortable knowing she has a fair and above-board position.

Selfishness can be justified occasionally, but dishonesty is rarely justified. Parents should consider their reasons for rules even in the early years when children are only beginning to use rationality as a challenge. If five-year-old Timmy can't go running and screaming through the house because it annoys Dad, telling him it is because nice boys don't do things like that is a little off target and changes the subject from an action (running) to a person (Timmy). Without the consideration of Dad part, the message about Dad being annoyed gets mixed up with, *"Dad thinks I'm not nice."* The message sent is now much more than intended. We wanted him just to stop annoying us, he thinks we said he's a bad person.

Avoiding Rules That Only Work Once

Parents should consider their reasons for rules even in the early years when children are only beginning to use rationality as a challenge.

Some planned consequences are better than others when it comes to their value in learning. A parental reaction of, *"If you don't stop running through the house all the time, we won't go to the circus."* or, *"We won't sign you up for soccer this year!"* ignores the principle of repeated practice. Going to the circus is a singular future event not likely to be repeated for some time. It's tempting to repeat the threat many times since the circus itself will only happen once. It's true that your child needs to learn that you should be taken seriously and that you mean what you say about

the circus or about soccer, but the consequence is so far off that any outcome will seem arbitrary.

So after all the argument, you either take the kid to the circus, and admit giving in, or you hold to your threat and don't take her/him to the circus, and admit you are giving no credit for the better behaviors. This says that, overall, he/she has been a bad kid. It's a one-shot consequence with no winners and little chance of a satisfactory outcome.

Another problem with these single consequences is that parents are tempted to do a lot of talking in order to "milk" all the influence they can from the upcoming big event. The temptation is to hold out the possibility of punishment over the child for days or weeks. This situation is gloomy for the family and for the event when it finally comes. It's like holding off the enemy in battle with only one bullet; you have to do a lot of posturing, bluffing, and threatening. Once you use your bullet, you are an ogre for not allowing the circus or a patsy for giving in! **And then the next day, we will need a new rule with a new threat.**

A very repeatable consequence makes it much easier to refrain from nagging.

A better strategy is to allow yourself and your family the enjoyment of individual events without trying to use them to limit bad behavior or produce good behavior. Instead, choose some smaller event that can come up more frequently, something not so severe, and something that has a positive side to emphasize. For example, instead of threatening to throw away all the toys that you have to pick up (an unmanageable and expensive threat with an "only once" character to it), possibly a "daily toy closet" could be designated where any toys that are still scattered after Dad has asked for them to be picked up go in the closet. The closet will be opened only at a certain time and then the toys can be reclaimed by their owners. Any toy left for parents to pick up is put in the closet for the next opening.

This procedure has the advantage of being a consistent and repeatable consequence. It is not so severe as to make parents feel guilty and inconsistent, and it is logically related to the problem of too much mess or danger from toys all over.

A very repeatable consequence makes it much easier to refrain from nagging. The repetition does the reminding.

Nagging on the problem can stop and the airways can be opened up a little for more pleasant family talk.

Definitions for Actions

In order to know when to reward a behavior, a clear description of the behavior is necessary so that you'll identify it when you see it. If you make a bet concerning which of two children will be first to share a toy with a new child, how would you decide when you win the bet? A precise definition of "sharing" is needed. Betting on the winner in a horse race is easy because everyone knows what a "winner" is—especially now that we have photographs of the finish, but to bet on a child's behavior can be a difficult problem in definitions.

Betting on how the children will share needs a very objective definition of "sharing" and then some agreement on behaviors to look for. Otherwise, there's too much room for interpretation, and the bettors may not always agree. For example, it could be decided that a child offering one of his toys to another will be called sharing.

For the purposes of the bet, it is not necessary to know why the child shares, or what is on the child's mind at the moment. He may share because others are watching, or to get a toy from the other child, or it may be for other "wrong" reasons. But a bet's a bet. And if the parents want to agree on supporting sharing in the child they will need a similar definition, and they too will not know the child's mind at any moment.

Behavioral definitions help parents agree on when encouragement—concrete payoff or social praise—should be given. The decision is important. If parents have agreed on what the good behavior is, then the good behavior is a signal and likely to get parental attention.

For the purpose of the bet, the behavioral definition of sharing was one child's offering a toy. When the child drifts away from sharing, by, say, snatching a toy from his playmates, the temptation to correct or reprimand a "mistake" with the rule deserves careful consideration. **A reprimand or correction always runs the risk of being more effective as attention than as the negative it was intended to be.**

In most cases the luxury of reprimands will have to be

passed by. In Chapter 8 and 9 we will take up the reactions to errors and mistakes, but in most cases ignoring the mistakes and emphasizing the positive is best.

In addition to making things clear, a rule or policy about a well-defined behavior gives the child the advantage of quickly understanding what to do and why. The parent's reaction must remain consistent. **If frequent little talks and explanations seem necessary, the behavior itself, or the reaction to it, may be too vague or variable.** The goal here is consistent, repeated practice with a reasonable, and very obvious, consequence.

How Much Explanation is Required for Children?

Not all the whys and wherefores concerning the results of a child's behavior need prolonged explanation. **Explanations are important when a new rule is to go into effect, but repeated requests for explanations may be just a form of filibustering to get the rule changed or to postpone it. What is important for learning and for producing reliable and desirable behavior is a consistent relationship between action and parental reaction.**

When you learn to drive a car, you don't understand all the complicated mechanisms of the car. An understanding of pistons, cams, and ignition systems is not necessary. As long as the accelerator, brake, steering wheel, and ignition key work consistently, you can learn very well. Learning becomes a nightmare if the car is difficult to start, has inconsistent brakes, or sloppy steering! In the same way, a child can gain experience from a reliable set of rules and policies without knowing all the adult reasoning behind the rules. Consistency is enough; understanding how the car engine works or why parents are anxious about certain situations is not required.

What is important for learning and for producing reliable and desirable behavior is a consistent relationship between action and parental reaction.

It would be a waste of time for driving schools to give detailed courses on internal combustion engines. At some stages, it may be a waste of time to continually tell a child about germs when

asking him to wash his hands before eating. An occasional reminder might be useful even at age 3, but repeated explanation may become attention for dirty hands.

A study concerning this need for understanding was conducted by E. R. Guthrie and G. P. Horton in the early years of psychology. In their experiments, a cat was placed in a problem box. As most cat owners know, cats enjoy exploring small spaces but it is not in a cat's nature to be content in a confined place. A pole in the center of the box could open the door if the cat pushed it, but because the cat did not know about the pole, it tried various actions to escape. It mewed and scratched at first, and then as it paced around, it bumped the pole and gained its freedom. It was not an insight any more than a child's first use of a doorknob is an insight. It was an accident. Nevertheless, a certain behavior did produce a good result, and when the cat was again put in the box, it was a little faster in getting out.

History does not tell us how many scratches Guthrie and Horton suffered, but they did try out the problem several times. The cat escaped faster and faster by rubbing the pole in the way a cat rubs a person's leg, thus releasing the latch. It didn't face the pole, grab it or scratch it, it just did its cat-like thing and got what it wanted. The cat didn't have to learn about latches and springs and hinges. Mechanical engineering is above a cat. It only learned the necessary: stand here, swing your rear so you rub the pole, leave.

Most of the everyday behaviors learned by children are also learned without a complete understanding of the processes involved. **From rattles and noisy toys, to spoons, to doorknobs, to dressing oneself, to TV remotes, to pleasing Daddy or Mommy, the skills develop and race far ahead of understanding.** Children, and adults at times, only understand that certain activities produce good results and that's enough. So it's best to be brief and conservative with explanations of rules—especially when a son or daughter seems to be enjoying the argument.

Necessary Planning about Strategies

The advantage enjoyed by Guthrie and Horton's cat was that it was a situation where success was likely. The box was not room size and the pole was not broom size. The rule was about a behavior well within the cat's ability. **As a learning strategy, it had all the right ingredients.** The set up was good, and the planned consequence, the escape, was ready and delivered quickly. The process of specifying these behaviors and consequences is the strategy.

The word "strategy," when applied to child-rearing, may at first imply a little too much struggling, a little too much confrontation, or even scheming. And there is a little of each of these in adult-rearing.

The important thing is to devote time and effort to planning—conscious, routine planning. Think about how much time and energy children have for figuring out how to accomplish their goals! When parents neglect planning they go into every child-rearing situation one step behind their children. **When I ask parents in training groups to spend 15 to 30 minutes each week in a strategy session, most parents find it difficult to set aside that time.** On the other hand, their children, without jobs or domestic responsibilities, have plenty of time for planning tryouts of new ideas and methods on their parents. It is a blessing that children are poor time managers!

Children are not all scheming little devils, but they do constantly test and experience their family situations—like the cat, only with more thought. If parents of a child-trying-to-be-a-teenager have lost some control over their son or daughter, it might be due to the many hours of the last few years the would-be teen spent searching for solutions to frustrations compared with the number of parental hours that were available to think through plans for change. Most parents of "kids gone wrong" are not guilty of bad decisions that led to bad procedures; usually the rushed confusion didn't leave time for planning and that may have been a factor in the outcome.

So the planning session is a necessity. With a parent group as suggested in Chapter 15, parents with and without partners can regroup, explore problems with other adults, and provide a

consistent set of rules.

In the single parent situation, the regrouping, the exploration, and the consistency may have to take place in one's own mind, but that may be the most important place for consistency anyway.

In any case, the planning session and the parent support group suggested in Chapter 15 help ensure that the behavior of concern will be recognized and consequences will be consistent. It need not be secretive. In most cases, telling your son or daughter the results of the session is beneficial. If a strategy will only work if the children don't know what it is, it's unlikely to work, it's a little dishonest, and it's probably unrealistic because they will find out.

...the planning session ensures that the behavior of concern will be recognized and consequences will be consistent.

Chapter 7

Adult Incentives for Children

At every stage of life people need some respect and recognition. This doesn't need to be money, often praise, encouragement, and admiration will do. But the support in some form is crucial for the essential feeling of self-worth. That's a particularly elusive feeling for a child. It's tempting to think that children growing up from "below" us should be content with good care. But their effort to grow needs strong positive support so that they value themselves and develop self confidence. What positive support can we have ready for them?

What are the Kids Looking For? Recognition, Respect, and Self-Respect!

"It's amazing how Duncan has taken to helping in the kitchen! He's four and yet he can really do things! He made his own scrambled egg the other morning. I told him how impressed I was and he made me one!"

What fun it is to impress your parents! Duncan loves to help with cooking, doing a little on his own, and having his parents say how great he is. One counselor I know said the high point of a boy's, or man's, life is when his father tells him

he's the fine son his father hoped to have. I'm sure it's the same for daughters, and I'm sure the hope for general approval from Mom is just as important.

...appreciation and admiration are the major part of influencing change

Since parental approval is such an emotional high point, it is a shame some parents often begrudge their children "too much" reward. Reward and reinforcement are terms that may sound too mechanical for parents only because the words emphasize the purpose of influencing behavior. When it is understood that appreciation and admiration are the major part of influencing change, the reactions seem more justifiable.

Yet many are still uncomfortable with the notion that some selfish benefit is required to get children, or anybody else, to do the right thing. *"They should do it for the love of it, shouldn't they? They know it's good for them! They had better be glad they have a good home and a chance to learn and advance!"*

Isn't this the way we all feel sometimes? Sometimes it just seems unbelievable that the kids would pass up an opportunity for personal growth, or fail to contribute to the family out of appreciation for the care they get. It's children we're talking about, of course. Employees asked to work a little longer or teachers asked to carry a larger load deserve something better than a pat on the back for their extra work. And our boss who expects something for nothing just doesn't understand our personal economic situation!

As a matter of fact the higher you go, the more is expected for any effort—managers and school principals don't feel respected unless they make a little more, corporation officers and members of congress worry that lower salaries for them would bring in people less competent than themselves, and CEO's demand golden parachutes of stock options so they will have the "proper incentive" to do a good job up there at the top. So it is common that the higher up's get more money and appreciation while both money and appreciation are more rare lower down.

However, when thinking about negative consequences, we often include possibilities for those lower down that would be too severe for higher up's. Some would say punishment is even

necessary for the little ones. Debates about punishments, taken up in the next two chapters, have a ring of prejudice to them *"A little spank would straighten him up!" "That sassy little girl needs a good smack!"* And the prejudice continues in some views of rewards also, *"If you reward children, soon they'll only perform for rewards." "Money will spoil children or make little materialists out of them."*

Of course adults expect to be appreciated for their contribution and expect to go unpunished and given another chance for their mistakes. A good supervisor will recognize that fact and support good adult performance and react positively.

Respect for Parents and Children

In showing appreciation and respect for children, it is often a good idea to ask what the proper consequence would be if our problem person were an adult. For example, Raymond at age seven continually disrupts dinner with loud, inappropriate noises, giggles, and comments. You might ask, *"What would we do about an adult, say, a visitor like Uncle George?"*

For Uncle George, you might first try to change the subject and calm him down by bringing up a subject of interest to him. It's an obvious suggestion because we all know that the person most in danger of becoming obnoxious is the one left out, with nothing to do, or just plain bored. The conversation should include Uncle George if we want a pleasant and comfortable guest, and perhaps the same goes for little Raymond. If that didn't work you might try a reprimand on Uncle George and the same might be used on Raymond. Beyond that, we could probably abandon the positive reinforcement idea, and **our view of the Uncle problem and the Raymond problem would become very different.** Uncle George would probably be tolerated with a mental note not to have him back.

Of course adults expect to be appreciated for their contribution and expect to go unpunished and given another chance for their mistakes.

Raymond, on the other hand, would probably be punished, sent to his room perhaps, or even snatched from

his chair for a little stern squeeze. That might get some results for the short run, but as experienced parents know, the dinner situation would be ruined, everyone would be mad, and Raymond, unlike Uncle George, will be back.

Raymond might do better if he got some adult treatment. Step One for Raymond might be to have him eat a little earlier for the next evening. Then when he comes back, we might use the adult, Uncle George, treatment for Step Two—a conversation at our Raymond's level and interest. If there is more trouble we repeat Step One of having Raymond eat earlier for an evening, and Step Two of having Raymond back for another try. How many times? Probably until Raymond gets it right since we can't just send him off with Uncle George.

Another approach to looking for reasons for Raymond's behavior is to ask, *"If Raymond were not doing these bad behaviors what would be available to him and what would be our reaction if he did act appropriately?"*

Is there any suggestion or incentive for Raymond to act out any particular behavior? This approach leads us back to Step One—the change-the-subject-to-fit solution.

But when adults sit down to dinner, they have stories to tell about their day at work and elsewhere. Raymond has some stories also, but he's not as skillful with language and **it's hard for him to break in if he doesn't get some special parent consideration.** It's difficult for Raymond if Mom reports on a conversation at work and Dad comments on the TV news and Mom responds with her description of the newspaper report on the same story and Dad says... and Raymond gets in only by acting up.

The adult conversation might be punctuated with, *"Sit up in your chair," "Eat your peas," "Don't make bubbles in your milk,"* and the ever-popular, *"Now look what you've done!"* Which is exactly what Raymond wanted everyone to do—look at what he was doing! Is this how Raymond gets his share of the dinner conversation? Uncle George would chime in on the news report or Mom's work experience, but Raymond is not up to that so he has to settle for negative attention—better than no attention—and he probably hopes the dinner will soon be over.

This notion of deserved attention might also apply to a child in a classroom. Alfredo's problem comes up in the lulls in

classroom activity. **You might say that Alfredo, like Raymond, doesn't know enough to busy himself without getting into trouble**, but another way to put it is that, for Alfredo, the opportunities for good behaviors are not obvious enough for him. If he's a first or second grader you wouldn't expect him to know what to do. **He lacks practice and if the class is large, benefits of "acting right", even if he knows what that means, are likely to be vague and infrequent.**

It takes a fine teacher to be able to catch Alfredo being good and provide the encouragement and attention he needs. If the teacher can hold to the view that the problem is a lack of something in the classroom that Alfredo needs, not an unchangeable problem inside Alfredo, Alfredo's behavior can improve.

Use Attention Thoughtfully When the Messages are Important

You don't have to carry around a bag of money and candy to keep the kids shaped up. You carry around yourself and, for the most part, that's enough. A honest expression of appreciation, praise, and encouragement can be very effective if done thoughtfully.

Social rewards are so easy to give that they are often given in an offhand manner—forgotten when they are most needed, thrown in when they send the wrong message. A rigid plan of reactions to your children would not be good either, but a continuous flow of casual attention has the danger of attending troublesome behaviors and drawing attention to unimportant activities, making troublesome behaviors out of trivia.

Dad: *Careful with the eyes on the teddy bear, they could come off.*

Nicole: *They could come off?*

Dad: *They're just sewed on.*

Nicole starts to finger the eyes of the teddy bear.

Dad: *I told you to be careful. Just leave them alone.*
Nicole: *They won't come off, see?*
Dad: *Don't do that! They'll come off.*

Whether Nicole or her dad turn out to be right about the teddy bear, the situation is now a confrontation, and if I were the teddy bear, I'd be nervous. **Dad started fixing a problem before he had one, and now he has one.** Let's have him try another situation.

Nicole: *I'm gonna sit on a regular chair tonight.*
Dad: *OK.*
Nicole: *Really. I'm big enough.* (Here's a hint that we are into an attention getting game. Why didn't Nicole just sit when she got the "OK" from Dad?)
Dad: *Uh huh.*
Nicole: (Sits on a regular chair) *I can't see from here.* (Waits, gets no reaction) *I want my old chair back, but I want it over here.*
Dad: *OK. I'll help you move it.* (Now Dad reacts to a reasonable request.)

Dad's bland reaction to Nicole's first idea provided no spotlight for Nicole's seating problem. She tries something that's not satisfactory, and then something that is. All the time Dad keeps this at the level of importance that it deserves.

Your social rewards, then, deserve close attention at times. You can't police yourself every moment, watching every move of your child and every word you say, and it would be an awful and inhuman situation for anyone who did. But when you are considering a specific behavior of your child, always consider the role your social attention plays—for good or ill.

Sophisticated adults give social attention and approval in subtle ways that can send mixed and mixed-up messages to a child. We use a nod of the head or lift of an eyebrow or a curiously phrased remark such as, *"I guess you finally got that*

right." Or, *"All right, you're better than last week."* *"You bet."* *"Oh, right, what a great job that was!"* It's hard to put into print exactly what these remarks mean without a description of inflections and pauses and tone of voice. Adults have a lot of practice in using and hearing such subtleties and react to and learn from each of them. But **a child, not yet grown up, hasn't learned all the details of sarcasm or understatement and the meanings these details convey.**

Make sure your sophistication doesn't get in the way when you are trying to support your child. Send your message clearly, be frank and outspoken when you like what has been done. *"Yes, that's good."* *"That's what I like you to do."* Say it loud enough, say it simply, let him or her know you mean it.

What is "Negative Reinforcement?"

The purpose of regular punishment, as everyone knows, is to reduce or eliminate bad behavior. The next chapters will discuss the pros and cons and alternatives to that procedure. **In negative reinforcement it is not the punishment for mistakes that threatens us, it's the punishment for failing to do the right thing!** The threat of a consequence for failing to meet someone's expectations drives us through most of the routine of our day. Why do I make dinner for the kids at the same time every night, use their favorite plate, prepare only certain foods? Is it because they watch for their chance to support my "good" behavior? No, the answer here usually begins, *"Well, if I didn't do that, the kids would complain and make a lot of trouble."*

If it's the lack of performance that would produce the negative reaction, it's negative reinforcement. As long as I avoid unwanted dinner delays, unwanted food, and do not disappoint my little masters, I avoid their punitive behavior. If they don't act up and fight, they can avoid my punitive behavior.

The difference between regular punishment and negative reinforcement is important. Regular punishment in its consistent form, doesn't produce happiness but it's easy to understand: *"If I do the wrong thing, I'll get bad consequences."* Negative reinforcement is more obscure: *"If I fail to do the right thing, I'll get bad consequences."*

Mom: *Zac, did you pick up your toys?*

Zac: (watching TV) *Not yet.*

Mom: *Did you put your dirty clothes in the laundry?*

Zac: *No.*

Mom: *How about the mess in the living room?*

Zac: *OK. As soon as this is over.*

Mom: *Take those dishes out, too.*

Zac: *OK.* (Remains an intimate part of the couch.)

Mom: *Zac, I have had it! Now turn off that TV and get these things cleaned up!*

Zac: *OK, OK, don't have a cow about it.* (Mumbling) *Gee, who knows when you're gonna blow up, anyway?*

Mom: *What was that?*

Zac: *Nothing.*

Part of Zac and Mom's problem is that Mom's strategy is a negative reinforcement one. If Zac fails to perform (enough times) and Mom asks him (enough times) then Mom gets mad. Mom may also support and compliment Zac if he cleans things up, but Mom's exasperation limit and Zac's fear of her are the main factors in driving the situation.

At times, the distinction between regular punishment and negative reinforcement may seem like a word game. Could we simply say that Mom threatens regular punishment for Zac's sloppiness? She could use that strategy, lock up the toys when they are left out, for example. But the punishment she uses is triggered by the lack of behaviors and occurs at a non-specific time. Zac is tempted to continue to procrastinate, delay, and test the limits while Mom is driven to using "mad" as a motivator.

Negative reinforcement does not produce a happy situation. If you do most of your activities each day just to avoid someone's flack, you're probably unhappy with him. Positive reinforcement is needed for a good relationship.

Dad: *Did you take the car in today?*

Mom: *Yes, it just needed a tune up.*

Dad: *Great, thanks for getting it over there; that takes a lot off my mind.*

Dad had the right support idea there, but in the next minute he slips a little.

Dad: *Did you get the little dinners I wanted for lunches?*

Mom: *Didn't go by the store after work.*

Dad: *Hey, how am I supposed to work all day without lunch?*

Mom: (Borrowing from Zac) *OK, OK, don't have a cow over it. I'll get them tomorrow and I'll make something good for you to take in the morning.* (Mumbling) *Gee, beam me up, Scotty!*

Dad: *What was that?*

Mom: *Nothing.*

Price Tags on Behavior

In a more perfect world, everyone would do the right things for the right reasons. We wouldn't need special incentives such as pay checks, bonuses, benefits, and parents using the right reaction. The work would be done because we all know it needs to be done. But **in the real world, all dieters, regular working folks, and exercisers know that motivation is hard to maintain.**

Concrete rewards may also be needed when laziness has become so habitual, and resistance to change so strong that we need contrived rewards to make even small steps in progress. For example, to improve the homework study habit, you might adjust the weekly allowance according to the amount of homework done. Some allowance is coming the child's way anyway, and important school work has to be done, so the real world

might as well start right here—work and pay go together.

Set the limits, both minimums and maximums, so that you can't be cornered into an unreasonable position such as allowing no money at all if no homework gets done or having to pay too much if all the homework is done. You will want to keep it simple, but without stated limits you'll be tempted to give out undeserved money or have to refuse to pay up for a sudden burst of activity.

It will be better to set limits at the beginning—say a $3.00 minimum and a $10 maximum. The practice is the most important thing going on in the child's life, so let's give practice some importance. We guarantee the minimum by saying, *"The $3.00 is for every week, but I'll add a dollar for each night your homework is all done, and two more for a whole week of successful homework nights."* You could tie the definition of "homework done" to pages of workbooks, or the teacher assignments or time spent on homework each night.

With this amount of structure, you'll avoid being an ogre who won't give any allowance, and you'll avoid extravagant payoffs for bursts of activity. After a few weeks, you may want to add special incentives for some subjects or change the definition of "homework done," or add an extra pay increase for special efforts. All rules are subject to change.

One of the keys to success in using incentives is to make very reasonable requests, especially at first. These requests should not be based on what should be done but on what has been the usual. An incentive for doing half-hours or hours of homework for a child who has not been able to stick with it for 10 minutes in the last three months is doomed to failure. Start at the level of the child now, establish his/her confidence, then the requests can be increased.

On Day 1, you want to guarantee that you will get an opportunity to use your incentive! Plan an incentive for a performance not only within your child's ability but within his/her inclination as well. For example, you might ask that only one page of a workbook assignment be completed before a whole half-hour of TV is approved. The payoff is so attractive and the price tag so small that a success is likely.

With little successes "in the bank," we can start a progression toward the amount of homework required before the

reward is available. The increments should be small enough to allow a smooth and easy increase in effort.

You must be careful when selecting "less logical or materialistic" rewards because they are usually not a natural benefit of the behavior and the time will come when your children will be on their own to be motivated by other less generous people.

This means that your encouragement, admiration, and praise must remain a major part of the rules even when concrete rewards are used. Your reactions must continue to send the message of the importance and usefulness of the activities you support, and you hope that they are behaviors likely to be supported outside the family in a way that is at least enough to keep your child on the right path.

Even children who moan and complain when asked to pitch in, still grow a little when they do pitch in.

The activities that other people support and believe important are probably the same as yours. Chores such as washing the car, mowing the lawn, painting, cooking, and shopping are some of the easy ones. A young person usually values the same activities but it may not be "in" to say so.

The required attitude toward chores should not mislead parents. Chores are useful in building self-esteem and respect. Even children who moan and complain when asked to pitch in, still grow a little when they do pitch in. Everyone wants to feel competent and able. So when you ask your child to do chores, take heart in the fact that the advantage goes far beyond getting the chores done. **As a matter of fact, the boost in the child's self-respect may be the most important outcome!**

Now as you allow your offspring into adult activities, remember to include the fun parts of the job and not just the less desirable parts of the job. When washing the car, she should get to use the hose as well as scrub the wheels. When shopping for food, he should be allowed to pick out a goody as well as get the soap.

One last caution concerning your first efforts to support good behavior. **the proof of a little success is in the daily and weekly changes, not the immediate reactions of the kids.** People, especially kids, can be very pessimistic about your power. Part of the pessimism may come from their own feeling

of powerlessness and part may be a desire to discourage you from trying to influence them! Don't buy it. The proof of change is in the longer term reactions and adjustment.

A second tactic of your kids may be to belittle the consequence as too weak to do any good. The power of consequences is in their accumulated numbers. Small compliments and encouragement, *"You're running the laundry through by yourself? You really are growing up!"* or *"Gerry, why don't you call in the pizza order, you're getting so good on the phone."* Every penny in the bank adds up—don't be talked out of it, just say (or think), *"Let's see how it goes."*

Chapter 8

The Penalties of Punishment

When a puppy goes on the rug, it's tempting to swat him, but he doesn't learn much from that, and tomorrow it will be harder to teach him anything because he will be a little more timid and harder to find!

In most parenting situations, punishment is a dangerous practice because it is likely to be more related to the frustrations and moods of the parent than to the mistakes of the child. Frequent use of punishment, when Dad or Mom have had it up to here, usually results in a child more interested in the moment-to-moment mood of his parents than he is in his own rights and wrongs. The child becomes a manipulator who knows that as long as he doesn't push too far, he's safe.

An Example of Punishment

Steve always shows off and acts silly when company comes or the family goes visiting. He makes a fool of himself while watching his parent's embarrassment for the telltale danger signals. He knows he can go further than usual because company is there and he knows the signs as he nears Mom or Dad's breaking point. **That breaking point is a much better predictor of real punishment than his own foolishness.**

So Steve's parents are continually agitated, they threaten punishment a lot, but usually don't carry through because Steve keeps them at the conflict point by not acting quite bad enough, considering Mom and Dad's current level of exasperation, to be punished. Steve has gained some control over the situation. True, he has made life miserable for everyone, but he likes being the focus and being in control.

Parents need to define the good behavior they want so they can get started rewarding it.

Two factors keep Steve's parents from getting the upper hand. **First, the punishments they have in mind are too severe for frequent use** although, considering the "little devil," they may not seem that bad. Sending Steve off to his room for a long time (too rejecting), leaving him in the car (too dangerous), or swatting him (too hard on the parents)—all of these disrupt whatever is going on, keep Steve in the spotlight, and give very little information to Steve.

The second factor is that **Steve's parents need to narrow their definitions of what is right and wrong.** They need a definition of what is right so that they can get started rewarding Steve, and they need a definition of what is wrong so that if any reaction is to be used, it comes because of what Steve does, not for what his behavior does to his parents. Adding these definitions will put consistency back in the situation and return control of the situation to Steve's parents.

Now they can look for a positive solution. For example, Mom could be willing to use the car as a time-out if she stays with him. The plan is not too inconvenient for Mom and Dad if they remember that giving the time-out itself has most of the effect; long stays in time-out usually add nothing to the results so one minute should be plenty unless a little cool-down time is needed. If we now work to improve the situation for Steve as well, we may be on our way to a better experience.

Mom: *"Steve, if you act silly over at Aunt Eileen's, we're going to take a time-out in the car."*

Steve: *"I'll be good."*

Dad: *"We're here. Steve, why don't you carry your cousin Betty's present in?"*

Steve: (At the door) *"Happy Terrible Birthday, Betty!"*

Mom: *"Steve, that's one."*

Steve: *"Well it is terrible."*

Mom: *"That's two and three, we're going back to the car, now!"*

Steve: *"No, no, I'll be better. I'll play nice with Betty."*

Mom: *"Sorry, the count's already done."*

Mom: (After one minute in the car) *OK, let's go back in and see what everyone is doing. When it's dinner time, I'll call you and you can help me serve the salad we brought.*

Steve: *"I'm going to get Betty."*

Mom: *"Steve, The rule is still the same: three counts and I'll have to take you to the car again - no extra chances."*

Will Steve be an angel the rest of the day? Probably not, but Mom and Dad have a plan and Steve's behavior is not going to be allowed to expand their discomfort and continually ruin their whole visit. Over a few visits, Steve will learn or Mom and Dad will look for another adjustment. Maybe Steve won't get to go at all for awhile.

The time-out procedure with Steve and other alternatives to punishment are described in detail in the next chapter. Some parents might already feel impatient with the idea of a long-drawn out rule that must be used on several occasions before they see any results.

Couldn't we just go ahead with a more direct punishment? Wouldn't Steve's parents be better off just giving Steve a good swat?

Every parent considers this immediate remedy now and then, but it has disadvantages. We have already seen a major disadvantage when Steve's parents first encounter his disruptive and obnoxious behavior with company. Punishment is likely to be used erratically because the trigger is the exasperation of the

parents, not Steve's actions. The direct punishment approach has other difficulties.

The Crimes of Punishment

Punishment often *encourages* bad behavior

Nancy and Martin make real trouble as a sister-brother team in a game of let's-see-how-much-we-can-get-away-with. Any suggestion to Nancy or Martin by their parents that they do "something nice" is rejected, perhaps because that would mean the game would be over.

Mom or Dad may hand out occasional punishments, but these seem to be absorbed by the children as simply low points in the game. **Other adults are usually suspicious about how much of Nancy's and Martin's bad behavior has to do with inconsistency in what they get away with.** Martin and Nancy's Uncle Harry often says, *"I wish I could get my hands on them for a week or two away from their parents. They would shape up in a hurry!"* The implication of Uncle Harry's wish is that he would continue punishment but somehow use it more effectively, possibly more consistently.

The Case Against Uncle Harry

If Martin and Nancy are to improve someday, someone will have to:

1. **Provide many opportunities for some well-defined good behaviors.**
2. **Plan good reactions to these good behaviors** that are desirable positive consequences for both Martin and Nancy, and
3. **Sharply limit the use of punishment to only the most obnoxious behavior,** and then either use it very consistently without fanfare, threats or pleading, or try an alternative to punishment described later in Chapter 9.

Carrying out all of this is much more difficult than hard-headed Uncle Harry wants to bother with when he says he could *"thrash it out of them."* The job requires much more planning than that. There are more disadvantages to a hard-headed uncle's punishment strategy.

Uncle Harry's idea of punishment probably would come in several forms: removing privileges and verbal and physical reactions that cause pain of one kind or another. Uncle Harry doesn't have to deal with the long-range picture of raising Martin and Nancy to be adults. For Nancy and Martin to grow to be happy, independent, productive adults, **their families need to be places where training through trial and error is encouraged, the opposite of what Uncle Harry would create.**

...punishment doesn't deliver the needed information about what a child needs to do and it runs a great risk of encouraging bad behavior...

Punishment is especially tempting to use when bad behavior demands an immediate reaction. It is also tempting to punish when long-term learning and relationships with the parent are temporarily unimportant. But punishment doesn't deliver the needed information about what a child needs to do and it runs a great risk of encouraging bad behavior because of all the warnings and threats we believe the child deserves before the hammer comes down.

Without any verbal decoration, direct, consistent punishment works just fine. Wall outlets and lamp sockets punish people who touch them and we learn quickly to be very careful. When you touch them, they give no warning; they don't think you look cute trying to be "devilish," and they don't give you a break because you've already had a bad day or haven't been reminded lately what will happen if you touch them. You get none of this consideration, you just get zapped. **But we are not wall sockets.** We love our children, and we are human. We want to be fair, and we want to be loving. So we rightly add a lot of warnings and threats, and these quickly come to have a role of their own in a game of let's-see-what-we-can-get-away-with.

During the game Mom and Dad cannot resist reacting to bad behavior with threats and warnings, and yet without warnings, the rule is unfair and inhuman. **So the case against Uncle Harry's use of the straight punishment rule is strong partly because Uncle Harry cannot, and should not, be consistent with it.**

The Pitfall of Inconsistency.

Parental consistency is always desirable and basic to learning. The lack of consistent reactions, on the reward side, leads to confusion and slows the pace of progress. The required inconsistency on the punishment side brings on the additional problems of reducing all behaviors. Remember that "mean" teacher you had in school? He, or maybe it was a "she," used punishments, reprimands, sarcastic remarks, put-downs, and embarrassments whenever the kids deviated from the desirable, and sometimes even when it seemed the kids had done nothing wrong! I bet you hated that class!

When punishment is uncertain, children become very cautious, especially when they are around the person who punishes.

A student's greatest fear is to be embarrassed in front of the class. With "Mr. Meany," you just couldn't be sure when you might trigger an embarrassing reaction. All behaviors (even volunteering right answers, suggestions, or questions) were reduced because you and your friends just wouldn't risk it. Not surprisingly, most "mean" teachers think the children in their classes are not very smart.

When punishment is uncertain, children become very cautious, especially when they are around the person who punishes. When around other people, a child's bad behavior may increase to let off the oppressed steam or just to somehow even the score. Parents also can fall into the "mean teacher" problem, but for a parent it becomes a sometime thing. Steve may learn to behave whenever Mommy threatens or looks mad. As Mom realizes this works she may take up "looking (and acting) mad" most of the time. Parents in this pitfall soon find that "looking mad" won't do and they have to act "really mad." **Now Mom has been pushed up a notch toward becoming a behavioral problem herself!**

Sorting out the people who "look angry"

The child in the "looking angry, acting angry" escalation learns the signals well and innocent baby sitters and teachers become fair game until they learn how to scowl miserably enough to get control. An additional social problem is now added because parents and others don't like to be forced to act

mad and would rather not be around the child because they don't like the person their own child makes of them.

As you will see in the next section, **the parent suffers most from the frequent punishment policy and the child may suffer less because he may distinguish between people who will play his game and those who will not.**

Discrimination

We all develop discriminations and act differently with different people. But when punishment is used, we do our best to avoid the punishing person altogether. **The negative, critical and threatening boss may have a reputation as a "hard liner" but the employees will duck and dodge her as much as possible.** And they'll give no extra effort. Who wants to please her?

The relationship that develops is one in which two people only barely tolerate each other because they are forced to. A child would like to escape such a situation because of the possibility of being punished, and the parent would rather be away (at work, at meetings, or just out anywhere) because of the uncomfortable parental reactions that seem to be demanded by the situation.

Losing the Victim

Victims of punishment want to escape. It's not always obvious that they do because they may have reasons for not just scratching at the nearest door. A small child would be stopped and a teenager threatened. But if the leaving option is not possible, then our victim may move on to other ways of escape. A child could withdraw to his room or to a special place, and even a teen could withdraw to a corner of his mind to daydream. **An absent student is difficult to teach.**

Whenever punishment is used, the parent is counting on some other aspect of the situation to keep the child within range of the punishment. Either the doors must be locked, literally or figuratively, or the rewards from the parents big enough to overwhelm the unhappiness. **No matter how effective punitive measures may seem in the short run, the parents must look forward to losing their child. That's why these strategies usually don't work on adults—they can leave.**

Sometimes continual punishment creates a different reaction than the reactions of Martin and Nancy. Sometimes the punishments are too much to cope with, too severe, too frequent. The child's solution may be to stop responding altogether or, at least, to respond as little as possible. The situation has produced a kind of success, the child is quiet. He is a very quiet child whose few tentative responses are likely to be pounced on with reprimands and corrections.

Even if the adults try a better approach later on, the child may now refuse to risk coming out of his or her shell. The biggest wish of this child is to get out, out of the room, out of sight, out of the house, if possible. Wouldn't we all rather dodge the punishment? **With punishment you have to find your child; when you use positive responses, your child finds you.**

With repeated experience, the situation preceding punishment signals a child to start withdrawing. It could be a classroom, a house, a time of day, a particularly dangerous person, or a combination of these. Once the experiences have taught the child these signals, the mere termination of punishment is not likely to be effective immediately, because the child will be unwilling to take risks to find out if danger has passed. Now the fear may seem unreasonable, but the only solution the child is willing to accept is withdrawal, a chance to get out of the situation entirely.

Effects Unintended

We may lose more than the presence of our child with punishment. Activities and behaviors that explore new opportunities for learning may also be reduced because they now seem dangerous. **Often only your opinion of your son or daughter is understood in punishment. The details of why you are so angry are smothered in the emotion, fear, and the desire to suppress the memory of the whole experience.** The lack of understanding combines with the fear of risking any more punishment, and we are well on the way to stopping all progress in this situation.

With punishment you have to find your child; when you use positive responses, your child finds you.

Parents Escalate When the Children *Don't* Get the Punishment Message

Many small children just can't seem to get on the right wavelength to figure when Dad or Mom is "mad, acting mad, or really mad." Consistencies may be there, but the child just doesn't see them.

There is so little information in punishment anyway—it only tells you one of the things you ought not to do, nothing about what to do. With so little to go on, the child could decide to ignore and forget these painful moments as soon as possible. We've all known a little Nancy or Martin whose mother reprimands, corrects, grabs, and sends them into confinement almost continually. *Most of the time, Martin and Nancy go straight on and do whatever impulse comes to their little minds.*

...our child will pick up cues from our behavior about what the appropriate reaction to unwanted behavior is.

Children Imitate When They *Do* Get the Punishment Message

Imitation figures into punishment in two ways. First there's the possibility that our child will pick up some cues from our behavior about what the appropriate reaction to unwanted behavior is. If a daughter frequently criticizes and yells at her baby brother, a careful observation of the parents' own reactions might be a clue as to where the daughter's reactions come from. If we slip now and then and react in anger, the risk is that this, too, may be imitated.

We usually think of child's imitation or modeling of a behavior as very specific. *"Look at the way he walks, just like his dad." "Look at the way she does her hair, trying to be just like Mom!"* However, the copying of a Mom and a Dad is more likely to be general. How does Mom handle situations where things don't go right? When others don't do what she wants, what is her answer? If Dad gets frustrated, how does he act? We all know how quickly kids will pick up those words of frustration when Dad hits himself on the kitchen drawer, but less obvious is the way kids pick up the cues on how to react to people and their mistakes! Parents can present an example of appropriate adult reactions and that will help when their children start casting about for something to do when frustrations

set in. So parents also avoid future problems by not presenting punishment as an acceptable (used by Mom and Dad) way of dealing with people.

Children make a lot of mistakes, being led into errors by peers, forgetting chores and commitments, indulging in unhealthy foods, and wasting time, to mention a few. Parents exhibit a lot of reactions and imitation of the reactions by the children is always a possibility. **When parents see so many errors it's difficult to be accepting and look to the long run, but, on some occasions, the goal of teaching how to react to others may be more important than correcting the mistake itself!**

The Aftermath of Punishment

When the situation has been dangerous for a long time, a reduction in punishment must be accompanied with an increase in opportunities for genuine encouragement. For the child made this timid, some very minor events can act as punishments. Simply interrupting him when he intends to say something at dinner may silence him for the whole meal. A verbal snap from his sibling may accomplish the same thing.

It will require many isolated one-on-one moments with generous parents showing great tolerance and support to draw him out. For example, the parent might begin with a daily habit of games and puzzles and book reading in the child's favorite place. Once the one-on-one sessions have been successful, the parents could try letting others back into the situation.

Check the Penalties of Punishment

Beyond the possible inconsistency of the parents, the discrimination of a scheming child, the escalation, and the aftermath, other disadvantages to punishment have led us to discard it for adults. The same diadvantages apply to children.

1. **It lowers self-esteem.** The emotional put-down of punishment distracts the child from learning about the desired behavior. The punishment act is itself childish and belittles the significance and power of the person

who is punished. The emotional reaction also detracts from a focus on learning the desired behavior.

2. **It hurts the parent-child relationship.** Punishment tempts the child to react to the parent with disrespect, silence, deceit, and avoid him or her altogether whenever possible.

3. **As the chance of punishment goes up, learning goes down.** A high risk of punishment decreases all behaviors and learning when the parent is present because of the atmosphere of criticism and threat.

> ***A high risk of punishment decreases all behaviors and learning***

4. **Punishment causes a power struggle among all family members.** It ruins the family as a nurturing place where learning is encouraged through practice with mistakes. The parent may win for the moment, but **for every winner a loser is made.**

5. **The parent becomes a poor role model for imitation.** How should a child handle others when they don't do the "right thing?" The parent becomes a punisher, a giver of threats and pain. *"It works for Mom maybe it will work for me, and I feel like it"*— the most natural reflex to punishment is to give some back. If it is not possible to punish the parent, the child will turn to others.

6. **It encourages stressful behaviors** such as nail-biting, hair-twirling, and "safer obsessions" with video games and TV. Whenever encouragement and reward are low, these stress behaviors will increase. These "escapes" are very stubborn habits maintained by their usefulness in avoiding contact with the punisher altogether.

7. **It interferes with future negotiations.** Why negotiate if you've already paid the price of punishment in the past and expect the same in the future?

8. **It is frequently inappropriate,** not related to the behavior, and therefore hinders learning. Most punishment is given because the parents have reached their limit of frustration and accumulated disappointments. A child can better predict punishment by watching the parents' emotions than by respecting agreements.

Any child being punished has one thought in mind, "Get away!"

9. **One-shot punishments, such as canceling a trip or party, are tempting consequences.** These large punishments are too late and produce the most resentment and argument with the least amount of change. Small, logical, repeatable consequences—preferably positive ones—produce gradual improvements in behaviors.

10. **It leads to the ultimate punishment—divorce. I mean the divorce of parent from child.** Any child being punished has one thought in mind, *"Get away!"* The child could plan running away or just some means of withdrawing if running away is impractical. And yet, complain as they might, your home is their most important source of security. So don't talk about divorcing your children. This ultimate consequence is too disturbing and implies that the value you place on your child can be easily traded away. Your love and loyalty have a higher price tag and should not become part of any bargaining.

So Why Would Anyone Use Punishment?

With all these discouraging problems, you might wonder why some parents continue to use punishment. Parent behavior should also diminish when it is unsuccessful. So when their action (punishment) doesn't get the desired result, why don't they just quit?

The answer is that in the very short term, punishment produces some results. If 8-year-old Fred has aggravated his mom all day and is now refusing to get in the car so that the shopping can get done and harried Mom grabs Fred, glares at him, gives him a little extra squeeze, and deposits him in the car

seat, then, for the moment, we have progress!

The short-term goal of getting on with the shopping is closer. The punishment has had an immediate effect, and Fred's ongoing flow of bad behavior is stopped. Mom has released a little tension and maybe Mom has "taught Fred a lesson" or at least evened the score.

The long-term disadvantages of Mom's punishment habit will grow slowly, but they will be big: Fred will feel worse about himself, about Mom, about the prospect of being better, and Fred will start thinking about how to use punishment himself to "get even." Fred could also start some stress behaviors—nail-biting, for example.

Now Mom's punishment behavior is being reinforced by its immediate effect in interrupting Fred's bad behavior temporarily. Fred's little habits of stress will attract some attention, and we are coming to an unpleasant routine supported by subtle short-term benefits. For Mom there is the brief respite and for Fred there is parental attention and a feeling of having no more blame, responsibility or guilt because he "paid the price."

Chapter 9

Five Alternatives to Punishment: Isn't Adulthood Nice!

A large investments firm reneged on a 1.3 billion dollar dividend last year because an accountant left off the minus sign — it was really a 1.3 billion dollar shortfall! How did the firm's president react to his accountant's $2.6 billion mistake? To his disappointed stockholders he said, "I guess that's why they put erasers on pencils!"

What alternatives to punishment do we use with adults? We all deal with unwanted adult behavior every day, but most of us have given up punishment of the straightforward kind, long ago. The culture we live in continues to provide some punishment—"logical consequences" we sometimes call them—and the courts hand out punishments for the larger transgressions. But logical consequences and court sentences are usually long delayed and given only for repeated bad habits and big mistakes.

Little, everyday, adult mistakes receive very kind reactions. Even blowing our horn in traffic is considered too aggressive. Often we just allow the person to correct the problem, or we ignore the mistake altogether, or we hope he

will pick up the right way from watching us or from our support of his successes. Or, if we control the situation, we might try to make it less likely that he will repeat the mistake, *"The boss should try to give better instruction." "We should put up more signs about how to use the printer!"* As a last resort, the boss will use warnings, and then, maybe, punishment.

This chapter takes up the application of these adult alternatives to situations with our children. It starts with the most common adult reaction to adult mistakes, making amends or allowing the transgressor to fix the problem. Then we'll take up the pros and cons of ignoring, of adding a guarantee for good behavior, of changing the convenience and of "Count-outs and Time-outs." **Since punishment has so many disadvantages anyway, let's get on to a more adult way of handling problems.**

Making Amends

Making amends is the number one strategy adults use to handle bad adult behavior. If you come to my house for dinner tonight and spill your drink at the table, what reaction do expect from me? *"Hey! What do you think you're doing? You're so clumsy! Now pay attention to what you're doing or I'll send you to your room!"*

That would be shocking! Instead, you expect the benefit of the doubt. No blame, it was an accident, and anyway, guilty or not, you expect to be allowed to make amends, you expect your host to belittle the problem, you even expect sympathy. *"Oh, too bad. No problem, I'll get a cloth."* You say, *"I'm sorry, let me get that. I'm sure I can take care of it."*

Isn't adulthood nice? Even with big mistakes, we would rather have the offender try again than punish him. At what age did you, and our innocent accountant with the 2.6 billion dollar mistake, earn such consideration? Why wasn't he punished? He was not because it would look as if the investment firm was a simple-minded company, naive and heartless. After all, mistakes happen.

Mistakes, by two-year-olds or accountants, accidental or not, should start with allowing the blunderer to make amends. Not that the accountant is likely to make up his mistake in this

century. A child deserves the same respect. It is only fair to assume he or she is doing their best.

Grandma: (Sitting down to dinner) *Whoops, now I know what I forgot at the store... coffee! But we have juice, how about that?*

Mom: *Juice is fine.*

Grandma: *I'll get it.*

Andy: *Whoops, Mobby licked my spoon when I had it down there.*

Grandma: *Don't use it now that the dog licked it! Keep your hands up to the table, don't you have enough sense to...*

Mom: (Interrupting) *Andy, just get down and get yourself another spoon.* (And then to Grandma) *Would you like some juice instead of coffee, too?*

Grandma: *What? Oh, ah, Yes, OK, OK. And Andy, could you put the dog out while you're over there?*

Ignoring

Ignoring a bad behavior usually decreases it, especially if part of the reason the child is acting up is for the attention he draws. If a parent can tough it out and hold back attention for the bad behavior, the child will go on to something else.

The pitfall here is that in the short run, more bad behavior is likely rather than less. This bad behavior has been a part of a habit for maintaining an interaction, an entertainment, and/or just plain attention from Mom or Dad. Now the parents plan to cut that off.

If the usual amount of acting up will no longer work, the child may just escalate the volume! At the higher intensity, the parents will be tempted to break the rule and punish this outrageous behavior. If that is temporarily effective, parents may return to the ignoring rule temporarily only to return to punish-

ment when the volume again reaches pain threshold. The process builds a new level of bad behavior. **Escalation is a very common problem because the natural childish reaction to failure (to get attention) is escalation.**

Ignoring the unwanted behavior and praising to encourage specific, likely, good behaviors will likely result in a positive outcome.

If you use a vending machine at work and one day, nothing happens when you deposit your quarters, what do you do? Calmly give up? Or would you press the coin return, yank on the coin return, bang on its little buttons, and then kick the darn thing?!

With the vending machine, you eventually cast around for another solution to the problem. Perhaps an attendant is there to help, another machine is available, or you go out to another store for your snack. Will casting about be successful? In this case it probably will be because there are plenty of alternatives for snacks. As a matter of fact, it is this knowledge that other choices are available that quickly gets you to quit acting "like a kid" and go on to another behavior.

Now what's available for the kid who finds his bad behavior no longer works his personal "vending machine"? *"If the usual volume isn't working, maybe I should try adding some really loud screams!"* He's going to escalate, then cast about. What will he find?

Mom and Dad need to have a plan to encourage some good behaviors and be alert to the first opportunity to work the plan! Ignoring the unwanted behavior and praising to encourage specific good behaviors will likely result in a positive outcome.

As you ignore low priority, unwanted actions, emphasize your praise and encouragements for desired behaviors. Make the message clear: I like you, I think you're special! *"I liked hearing about your report of the Civil War battle. You're learning about interesting things." "I noticed you helped clear the table after supper. That made me feel good."*

Ignoring Some of the Bad, Guarenteeing Some of the Good

Research tells us that catching people when they come near to appropriate behavior is a more efficient learning technique than punishment for errors. This is because it says, *"You've got it! You're on target!"* with a wanted behavior. Productive bosses use this.

When the boss praises your work you feel certain your actions are right, but when your work is criticized, you can't be sure about how to make it better. Reward says, out of all the possible actions, you found the one I want. Punishment gives less information, because it only says that out of all the possible actions, *"Your behavior is one of the many wrong ones!"* Considering the many possibilities for error, **a child isn't very much closer to learning an important skill just by being told, *"Wrong!"***.

Chapter 3 covered some advantages of watching for the successful behavior and providing good positive feedback when it comes up. That "catch 'em being good" notion can be particularly useful when you need the ignoring strategy for an unwanted behavior. Without a positive side to the strategy, things could get worse instead of better. For example, just withholding attention from, say, temper tantrums of a five-year-old is not a good plan by itself. To allow the anger or other obnoxious behavior to go unrewarded is a courageous decision but without an obvious alternative, the result is likely to be bigger and more aggressive reactions.

Reward says, out of all the possible actions, you found the one I want.

Using ignoring by itself produces the common reaction to the balky soft drink machine that fails to pay off. So be ready for some pretty desperate behavior when reward is first removed from a tantrum or any other behavior. But also be ready with support for the alternative behavior when the person looks for another solution. **Catch him being good!**

As tantrums subside, the child finally begins to cast about for a new solution. What he finds and latches onto will depend on the parent's understanding of the outcome he is looking for.

If the child needs attention, the situation will not be made better if our strategy, overall, reduces attention! We should make a mental note to respond to new behaviors whenever we plan to ignore unwanted behavior.

Practice and experience is the core of child development, but it only continues with good consequences for each success. It can be tiresome and frustrating to a parent to let a child practice a task, foul it up, and do it again with as much encouragement as the parent can honestly muster. **Making a seven-year-old's bed is so much easier than coaxing him to try it and make a mess of it. Telling a ten-year-old girl what to wear is easier than sending her back for another look to replace inappropriate clothing probably with other inappropriate clothing on the first few trys.**

The situation can be particularly difficult when enthusiastic encouragement and reward must be provided for the first poor approximations of the ideal behavior, but the need for these reactions is crucial—it is an absolutely imperative kind of practice. It would be nice if, after a little practice, children would continue to perform on their own, but we must provide continuous reasons in order to enjoy continuous improvement. **You must always be a rewarding parent just as you must always be a rewarding spouse or friend.**

"Catch 'em being good" means recognize, praise, and reward the good behavior you see. We all need encouragement, and parents need to be diligent in catching their opportunities to be encouraging.

Practice and experience are the core of child development

Children try new behaviors every day to find the adjustment that seems right. Perhaps you remember as a child thinking, *"When I make mistakes everyone notices and I get in trouble, but a lot of times I do well, and nobody ever says a thing."* **To prevent unwanted behaviors, parents need to "catch 'em being good," not just when the desired behavior occurs, but when a behavior in the right direction comes along.**

Actions that are improvements and steps forward need the most encouragement, recognition, praise, and reward. Be realistic about where to start the encouragement. In the "catch em being good" alternative, you must start rewarding at the level the child can do, and move toward

the improvements. A kid who stays in her room most of the time will not change if criticized, but may come out more often if she finds appreciation and activities she likes when she is in the family areas of the house. **No one resists sincere praise.**

"Catch 'em being good" means recognize, praise, and reward the good behavior you see.

The Cost of Inconvenience

Many little inconveniences, particularly those for older children and adults, may seem at first trivial, but when put into practice they may be extremely effective. For example, if Dad has to put a penny in a jar on the kitchen table every time he loses his temper, it may seem like a trivial act for someone with plenty of pennies. But if the rule is strictly followed, the inconvenience of having to stop, get a penny, go into the kitchen and put it in the jar can be a very effective consequence. **It's not the money but the behavioral "cost" that makes this consequence work.**

As a strategy for removing or reducing smoking behavior in adults, many psychologists use the principle of inconvenience. The heavy smoker is instructed to keep an exact record of his smoking throughout each day. He carries a little notebook wherever he goes and writes down the time, to the minute, when he takes out a cigarette, and the time he puts it out. He may be asked to note the situation as well, including who was with him and what he was doing. Some psychologists also ask for the cigarette butts to be saved and brought in for counting.

These tasks may not seem like consequences as we have talked about them so far, but they are consequences of a most useful type. They are costly activities, and **many a smoker is just too busy to make all those entries and save all those butts, so he takes a pass on having that cigarette.**

Such a self-administered procedure requires a cooperative and trustworthy subject. I have found the cost-of-inconvenience procedure useful with smokers referred to me by doctors who have told the person that their health or even their life is at stake! They usually want the process to work and can be counted on to try hard. The procedure has not worked well on people who "feel they should cut down" or quit "for the children's sake." With these less-motivated subjects, it takes

stronger measures than raising the cost of inconvenience.

Sometimes children can be enthusiastic about a record-keeping (response cost) procedure. One mother reported that her 19-year-old son, Mike, continually disrupted the family by "checking things." On some evenings, he insisted on checking as many as 70 things before going to sleep. Mike checked to see if the back door was locked. He checked to see if the light was out in the basement. He checked to see if his pen was on his desk, and if his dresser drawers were closed. Some of this would have been reasonable, but the situation got out of hand when he checked the same thing for the fifth or sixth time in the same evening!

At first his checking was examined for the possibility that it was an attention-getting behavior. Some progress was made by reducing Mike's parents' attention to the excessive checking and increasing conversation time before he went off to bed. The most effective procedure was beginning a record of every item checked, the time it was checked, the result of the check, and what could have happened if the item had been left unchecked. This procedure involved so much writing and decision-making that it was nearly impossible to check 70 things each evening.

Because of the work and inconvenience of the procedure, Mike began to pass up the items that were not so important and he made a special effort to remember the ones already checked, or look at his record, so that he didn't have to do it again! The number of times Mike checked things soon was down to a level that was only a little unusual instead of downright disruptive of the family.

The same principle of inconvenience can be used to increase a habit. For example, good homework habits can be influenced by how convenient it is to get started. If there is a place to do homework with little distraction and paper and such to work with, then we have a better chance of getting some homework done.

Donna: *I'm not going to practice this stupid violin any more, it's too much trouble!*
Mom: *Just another ten minutes, then you can quit.*
Donna: *Phooey.*

Donna's practice is best done in intervals that keep frustration to a minimum, but once Donna begins, Mom hates to let her quit because it's such a hassle to get her to start again. **Maybe Mom could do away with some inconveniences associated with Donna's practice.** She could help Donna get out the music, set up the stand. Then while Donna checks the tuning, Mom could turn off the TV and get everyone else far enough away. If some of these inconveniences to starting could be done away with, maybe practicing would happen more frequently.

Mom: *Let's set up a special place for you. How about in our bedroom? We're never in there when you need to practice and it's away from the TV and your brother. You can leave your music and stand out, and it won't be disturbed.*

Donna: *OK, but I still think all this practice is stupid.*

We have not solved the violin problem by just finding a place for practice. Donna is going to need more encouragement than that. Mom needs to visit the practice situation a lot, comment on the progress, and help the instructor find practice of interest to Donna. But **a place to practice easily, and without frustrating start-up time, is a step toward making it all happen.**

Count-outs and Time-outs from What?

Sometimes the bad behavior demands a reaction. We don't let adults get away with just anything and children shouldn't be misled that anything goes either. Since punishment has such side effects, what alternative is there when bad behavior should not be just ignored or inconvenienced, and making amends or hoping for imitation is just not enough?

For young children time-out is often a good solution. We all know the drill of putting the child on a chair or in his/her room for a little "cooling off" and isolation as a kind of punishment. The procedure can work well if the threats, arguments, and other verbal decorations that often precede the time-out

can be kept to a minimum. **These threats and arguments have a potential we don't want—they could be rewarding.** So many psychologists suggest using a counting technique.

Mom: (Liz throws a toy at her sister.) *"Liz! We don't throw toys. You could hurt someone. That's one!"* (Liz throws again.) *"Liz, I told you. That's two."*

Liz: *"I don't want it!* (Liz throws again.)

Mom: *"OK, that's three."* Mom takes Liz to the kitchen chair and deposits her there.

Mom is doing well. She doesn't talk much during the count which could be rewarding attention, **she doesn't make a lot of threats and doesn't use a dramatic punishment, but she does use a correction that can be repeated frequently without a big build-up.**

How long should Liz remain in the chair? A very short time would be best. **Many parents have found the act of starting the time-out, being put in the chair or room, is the effective part.** Prolonged isolation probably is not effective because the child forgets exactly what it was all about, and the situation will have changed so much after a long isolation that there will be no opportunity to practice anything right. Ten or 15 seconds is enough for two-year-olds, and one minute is enough for four, five, and six-year-olds. The message was sent when the prompt decision was made at the count of three (or ten, if that's the rule).

The same counting can be used for an ongoing behavior. Duncan starts rocking on top of a wobbly chair and Mom says, *"Duncan, that's dangerous, stop it."* If Duncan doesn't stop, Mom says, *"Duncan, stop. That's dangerous. OK, that's one...two...three...four..."* If Duncan is still at it at ten, Duncan goes to time-out.

All of these strategies require effort, and some are downright hard work so make sure you eliminate any trivial behaviors from your rule before you start a plan.

When Tim insisted on always using a fork for food, even when it was chunky soup, his parents didn't like it but felt he

had the choice. In their weekly planning session they agreed the use of a fork was unimportant and decided to make nothing of it. But when he hit his younger sister, they reacted strongly and used the time-out method.

Their different reactions to these very different behaviors keep the family atmosphere from becoming cluttered with unnecessary criticism of trivial, or at least temporary, problems while sending a message that Mom and Dad care and will not tolerate bad behavior.

Bedtime as a Time-Out Or Not?

Bedtime is an important moment. Children aren't always cooperative and most parents are ready for a rest from the parenting job. It is not a moment when you need the extra disadvantage of an attitude developed by a child sent to bed as punishment. How can being put (or sent) to bed be sold as a punishment at one time and as something the child should want to do at another?

Bedtime goes through many adjustments in years one to ten, from two naps a day and a long night, to one nap, to no naps, and a shorter night's sleep. **Few of us ever adjust to a very rigid set of sleep hours, and what happens in a child's day is as big a factor as it is for adults.**

That's enough difficulty for this part of growing up without adding in a mixed message that says going to bed can be bad.

Exercise and Summary for Part 3

Completing a Planning Session Agenda:

Planning sessions have a dangerous tendency to turn into general gripe sessions. Although complaining can be therapeutic for parents, they often jump around from one problem to another without concluding a plan for any particular problem.

So a planning session needs an agenda that determines parental reactions to a particular situation. The session should also produce an overall understanding of what is going on when the specific problem is encountered.

The purpose of this exercise is to do a complete "walk through" of a problem you identified in the earlier exercises. You may not always need such a complete analysis, but for the purpose of becoming alert to the possible aspects of behavior, this exercise will include all the steps.

First select a behavior from your priority list at the end of Exercise 2. This will be the problem under discussion in this session.

STEP 1 **Fill out a Behavior Page** as you did in Exercise 1. A short outline of the page is presented below and several blank ones are included at the end of this book. You will not yet have a record of the behavior as described in the last part of the page, but you can put down your own observations as you remember them to answer those questions.

A Behavior Page:

Question 1:	What would be an objective description of the behavior?
Question 2:	What happens next?
Question 3:	Where would you place the possible blame and/or credit?
Question 4:	At what age would you expect an average child to do what you are hoping will be done in this situation?
Question 5:	How could we allow more practice?
Question 6:	When do things happen? (Keep a record.)

DATE/TIME	What Happened?	Just before this?	What happened next	Special Remarks

STEP 2: **Review this checklist for consequences** as you consider possible reactions to the behavior. Pose each of the following questions in the planning session.

Is the problem big enough to bother with? Remember even a "No" here should indicate a strategy—a strategy to eliminate nagging your child or yourself about the problem.

Am I attempting too much at one time? A tempting pitfall in parenting is to try too many changes at once. Don't attempt to control eating, piano practicing, bed-making, and homework all at once. Concentrating on too many plans leads to mistakes and too much "policing." Think small. Begin with one rule at a time.

Can the behavior be guaranteed without the management of consequences? Some behaviors can be made unlikely by engineering the environment and that strategy is sometimes easier than using rules. For example, a special kitchen drawer

of utensils for a son or daughter's cooking projects may be easier than the worry of accidents with dangerous or fragile instruments.

Have we thought of all the consequences that could be maintaining the behavior? A good way to separate consequences is to consider what we have now? What usually happens when the "bad" behavior occurs and what happens next? What usually happens if she performs correctly? If we select a new consequence, how should we set up the practice?

Is the consequence a one-shot? In the one-shot consequence, a rule that can only work once, a parent uses a promise of something good or threat of something bad in the future as a consequence for a present behavior problem. Whichever way the consequence is stated, threat or promise, it has the same disagreeable characteristics: it is not repeatable, it tempts the parents to use repeated threats and will probably be somewhat arbitrary in the end. And then the next day what shall we do? Start a new threat?

Is the consequence too severe? Be sure that your selection of a consequence is not a reaction to one case of bad behavior. You want something that can be used repeatedly. As a matter of fact the real test will come after things have settled down. The main feature of your plan that will help you through this test will be that you have planned to reward good behaviors reasonably and react to bad ones reasonably. So don't make plans when you're still angry over a mistake. Paying attention to only bad behavior won't help.

If ignoring is the plan, has the resulting deprivation been prepared for? If tantrums are to be ignored, what is to be attended?

Is the expectation reasonable? Your expectation may be reasonable but still much more than your daughter has ordinarily been doing. She was used to nibbling and now you fill the plate and tell her no dessert until she finishes. Remember we need to start where she is, not where you wish her to be.

Is the consequence too weak? What can be done if your child just doesn't seem to care about the new consequence? It could be that you are not sticking to the rule and he really doesn't have to care. Or possibly he has too many other freebies available. (If I can't go out, I'll watch TV!)

Are you starting with a behavior that is simple enough so that you are sure that rewards can occur—even on the first day?

STEP 3: Review this Checklist for Alternatives to Punishment.

1. Could you use the adult reaction to adult mistakes, making amends?
2. Or is it possible to first try ignoring
3. Before going on to harder work, could we try to help the child to see us as a good model.
4. Have the other possibilities presented in the preceding chapter been considered: "catch 'em being good", changing the convenience of the behavior, and "count-outs and time-outs."

PART 4

Listening, Coaching, and Teaching

Children learn how to get along in the world by advice and example from parents. This doesn't come pre-wired and it doesn't come naturally. Social habits are too important to leave to chance, people, and circumstances. To help, parents need a lot of information about what is going on. Careful listening and communication are the focus of the first chapters of this part. Then parents can pass along good advice about schoolwork and understand some of the social "games" children play. Later chapters will lay the groundwork for talking with kids about how schoolwork and play are <u>really</u> going.

Chapter 10

Successful Parenting Requires Careful Listening

If it is language that makes us human, one half of language is to listen.

- Jacob Trapp

The Crucial Growing Up Question: "Mom (Dad), Can We Talk?"

If we meet someday and you tell me you only used one idea from this book, I hope it is from this section about listening skills. With open, available lines of communication, most of the fairness, influence, and negotiation described in the other chapters will be worked out.

Vulnerable. That is a feeling familiar to all children. They know they have much to learn, and they know they are making many mistakes because they are encountering so much at one time. Who is a safe confidant? **Who can a son or daughter go to with problems? Who will be tolerant and uncritical like a friend, and yet informed and helpful with suggestions from experience like an adult?**

Most parents meet the requirement of experience, but to have an opportunity to pass along advice, you must be tolerant

enough to hear the problem. That's why the first requirement of tolerance and acceptance is needed right at the beginning—in the earliest years! And in the earliest part of each conversation.

The beginning of a talk about a problem is the most risky moment for a child because of their vulnerability and possible embarrassment. What should your first reaction be? If I were your child, I would hope that you would "hear me out" in presenting the story or problem—that you would not become critical or try to place the blame quickly.

The description of listening skills presented below may be already familiar to you, but it is so important to quality parenting that some review as well as new tips for keeping an open communication with your child are given special attention here. Modified versions of the examples below also appear in our book, ***Teenagers and Parents*** because these skills are needed for the very first steps in developing a good relationship with older kids as well as young ones.

Learning About Listening Skills

What do parents do to tell their child they are listening? Before discussing what you <u>say</u> in a conversation that sends the "I hear you" message, let's look at two important behaviors parents should <u>do</u>.

It's nerve-wracking to have a person stare at you while you're talking, but a person who always looks somewhere else also frustrates their conversational partner. Put aside the newspaper and turn off the TV to show you are listening. This will keep your mind on the topic, and it's a good example for your kids.

In order to look at someone, you have to face them. It can be casual; there's no need to be "in their face" through the whole talk, but we all know the uncomfortable feeling when someone turns to other distractions or actually walks away while we struggle to keep up and finish what we want to say.

Along with facing your child, be aware of other aspects of posture that send the wrong messages. Slumping, stretching, and fidgeting with some distraction indicate a lack of attention.

With good habits of eye contact and posture, let's turn to conversational style.

First of all, your style of communication sends a message about how you feel about your partner in conversation. **A child listening to a parent extracts this evaluation in less than a sentence.** If the signals are negative, up come the defensive reactions before any useful exchange begins.

Mom: *So did you play nice with Kevin at his house?*
Walt: *Yes.*
Mom: *You didn't fight with him?*
Walt: *No, I didn't!*
Mom: *Did you share?*
Walt: *Yes, can I go now?*

Mom's message here is that Walt may have been bad. Walt has the message in the first question and wants to leave. What happened over at Kevin's? Did Kevin do something that Walt needs to learn how to handle? Did anything unusual happen that Walt needs to have explained? We may never know.

Does Mom like Walt? Does Walt like Mom? Mom's listening style is a vehicle for the liking message described in Chapter 4.

Second Chance:

Mom: *Have a good time at Kevin's?*
Walt: *Yeah.*
Mom: *What did you do?*
Walt: *Just watched TV.*
Mom: *What? I didn't send you over there just to watch more TV!*

Until TV gets into it, Mom was doing well, let's give her another chance on this last reaction. Walt didn't have complete control over what he and Kevin did. **We don't know if watching TV was Walt's fault, but the tone puts him on the defensive.** Mom may not like the activity (if watching TV is an

activity), but bringing that into a conversation with Walt won't encourage him to say much more. Instead Mom could say less.

Avoid instant criticism.

Another Chance:

Mom: *TV?*

Walt: *Yeah, we got to fooling around and his sister fell off the couch.*

Mom: *Fell?*

Walt: *Well, she was sort of pushed.*

Mom: *You have to be careful around little ones, Walt. Kevin knows that because he has his sister there.*

Now what's the answer to. Does Mom like Walt? Does Walt like Mom? Not very different, except that Mom separated Walt from Walt's behavior, made it easier on Walt and he learned a little.

Mom's answer to the question of who likes who might be, I love my kids, but I don't always like them, that is, **I don't always like what they do, so I try to show them that I like them yet still show necessary disapproval when it's needed.** You can't like anyone's behavior 100%, but by being non-critical, the greatest amount of liking and friendship comes through.

Do you like to talk to your fellow employees at work? Some of them? Possibly the ones with whom you've found "lots in common" and who will listen to your side as well as take up the air time with their own talk. These are, no doubt, discoveries we all make about our fellow employees in many easy-going conversations. It takes a lot of learning about someone to become at ease with them in conversation and have them feel that you like them. Let's get started by opening up the doors in conversation. There are some rules to this important game.

"You should have seen what happened in gym today, Dad."

"What, Donald?"

"Keith got in an argument with Mr. Effort and they ended up in a real fight!"

"I'm sure it wasn't much of a fight."

"Yes it was! They were wrestling!"

"I hope you didn't have anything to do with it."

"Naw, all I did was cheer."

"Cheer? Listen, Donald, you'll end up in trouble right along with Keith! Don't you have any more sense than to . . ."

Let's interrupt Dad here just for a moment. **Donald, like all kids, resents the way his dad turned his story into a talk about the mistakes that Donald might have made.** The experience will reduce his talks with Dad in the future. Dad criticized his son's story: (1) he thinks Donald was wrong because it wasn't much of a fight, (2) Donald probably had something to do with it, and (3) he shouldn't have cheered. Dad centered the conversation on what he disliked about his son's behavior instead of the story. All this happened in a 20-second discussion.

Our first rule of conversation is to avoid instant criticism. Let's back up and give Dad another chance to be more friendly but still help Donald consider possible consequences of the gym-class experience.

Second Chance:

"You should have seen what happened in gym today, Dad."

"What happened, Donald?"

"Keith got in an argument with Mr. Effort and they ended up in a real fight!"

"How did it all start?" (Dad ignores the possible exaggeration, doesn't express doubt, and shows interest instead.)

"They just started arguing about the exercises and Keith wouldn't give in.

"Hard to win against the teacher." (Dad comments in general, and suggests alternatives that are not critical of Donald.)

"Yeah, Keith is in big trouble."

"Did they ever get around to the exercises?" (Dad is interested in the story, not just in making points and giving advice.)

"Keith was sent to the office and then we tried these safety belts for the flips. Do you know about those?"

"I don't think we had them in my school."

"Well, you have these ropes..."

Donald has a clearer view of the incident now, and understands the hopelessness of Keith's argumentative attitude. **Keith wasn't distracted with defending himself when he told Dad the story,** and now he's explaining something to his father. Dad is showing respect for Donald and seems to think Donald has something interesting to say.

We All Dislike Instant Evaluation.

Immature people are usually self-centered. Some adults and almost all children fit this category. The most important part of conversation for these people is, "What does the message say about me." **Young people "tune in" to parts of conversations—the parts about them, and they are less interested in the content of the talks.**

Many family conversations go wrong because the child reacts to the opinion expressed about him or her while we thought the topics were the important parts!

So your children may learn that all conversations with you are safe, because you seldom bring up their shortcomings and failures. Or they may learn you always have a criticism or advice to give, and little talks with you should be avoided.

Use "It" Instead of "You."

People who use positive communication are "easy to talk to." They seem interested in the other person (they talk about,

and ask about, the other person). If conversation becomes threatening, they make it comfortable by using the second rule of conversation. Try to look at a problem as an "it" instead of something about you or me.

Mom: *"How was art class today?"*
Eric: *"Oh, OK, what I saw of it."*
Mom: *"What do you mean?"*
Eric: *"Mrs. Clay sent me to the office."*
Mom: *"What did you do?"*
Eric: *"I didn't do anything!"*
Mom: *"You must have done something; you aren't sent to the office for nothing!"*
Eric: *"You never think it could be the teacher's fault; you always blame me!"*
Mom: *"What kind of talk is that? Let's have the whole story!"*
Eric: *"Oh, nuts!"* (Eric stomps out.)

This conversation goes wrong when our parent asks personal and threatening questions such as, *"What do you mean?"* and *"What did you do?"* All of this would have come out eventually, but the parent's impatience erased any chance for helping. Mom could do better by keeping the personal threat at a low level and talking about the problem as a third thing, an 'it' topic instead of a "You" topic.

Second Chance:

Mom: *"How was art class today?"*
Eric: *"Oh, OK, what I saw of it."*
Mom: *"You missed some of it?"*
Eric: *"Mrs. Clay sent me to the office."*
Mom: *"What happened?"* (Emphasizes "it" instead of "you." IT happened. This is much better than, What did YOU do?)
Eric: *"Tom ripped my paper."*

Mom: *"Oh no!"* (Emphasizes sympathy rather than her child's upcoming mistake)

Eric: *"Yeah, so I shoved him."*

Mom: *"And so she sent you to the office?"* (Emphasizes the punishment without adding to it.)

Eric: *"Yeah."*

Mom: *"Then what happened?"*

Eric: *"Well, for one thing, I'm behind in art again."*

Mom: *"Well, if you can stay away from Tom maybe you'll catch up. What else happened today?"* (Adds a little parental advice and then on to looking for something more positive)

Use Reflective and Sympathetic Statements

Often a child's first remarks are only an expression of feelings and are short on facts. If a parent reacts with advice or opinion with so little information, the parent's response could be way off target. Reflective statements are useful to hear the child out. The term, reflective, describes parental reactions that say nothing new but only repeat what the child said in different words. They send a message of *"I heard what you said,"* they keep the conversation going, and they provide opportunities to get straightforward information without defensiveness. They also show sympathetic understanding. Let's look at an example of reflective statements in action by a father learning about his daughter.

Brenda: *"Man, is that school boring!"*

Dad: *"It's really getting you down."* (He just uses different words for "boring", this is reflective and tells his daughter he is listening)

Brenda: *"You bet."*

Dad: *"What's getting you the most?"* (A good it-question starts with "what," instead of, Why are YOU so bored?)

Brenda: *"I don't know. I guess it's the whole thing."*

Dad: *"You need a break."* (Good, sympathetic remark that avoids, "There must be something wrong (with you)!". That would be threatening.)

Brenda: *"Yeah, but vacation is six weeks away."*

Dad: *"That's a long time, got any plans?"* (Good reflective statement that directs the conversation onto a positive topic.)

Brenda: *"No."*

Dad: *"Hard to think that far ahead."* (A reflective statement that repeats "No plans" in different words, it is also sympathetic and friendly.)

Brenda: *"Pam is getting some applications for camps."*

Dad: *"Sounds like a good idea."*

Brenda: *"I might ask her about it."*

Intentions are <u>not</u> actions, but they can produce entertaining arguments.

A complaint about boredom such as this is a familiar remark to most parents. Although not much is solved about boredom in this conversation, Dad has a better understanding of the feelings of his daughter and may feel encouraged to be tolerant. **He avoided the temptation to "get something done" in this short talk.** Indirectly, Dad said he has had similar feelings to his daughter's and it's all right to have those. Most important, it's all right to talk to Dad about feelings without being criticized for feeling "bored."

Because Dad has allowed his daughter to direct the topic, information has flowed <u>to</u> him. If he had directed the topic, information would have flowed <u>from</u> him as advice, but he would learn very little about his daughter. Letting his daughter direct the conversation now gives Dad the added benefit of a "ticket of admission" to begin next time. *"Say, did Pam ever get any camp applications?"* or, *"Only five weeks to go now; how's it going?"*

A few weeks and months of this effort from Dad and these two will be good friends. Notice there is no room for old complaints in this approach. The frequent complaints such as, *"You shouldn't be bored!" "You never plan ahead like Pam!"* or out-of-left-field old complaints such as *"You never do your homework!"* and *"You don't come when I call you"* should all be left out of these conversations. Such criticisms are too broad, and therefore, will be taken personally because they say, *"And while I'm thinking about you, another thing I don't like is..."*. Instead Dad encouraged his daughter to take the conversational lead and parental topics are postponed.

Caution: Arguments for Entertainment's Sake Can Be Habit-Forming!

The answer as to whether the behavior is important enough to bother with is particularly important when the conversation or argument is really about what your child says, not what he does. Intentions are not actions, but they can produce entertaining arguments. Your child may want a reaction or just want to convince you that you can't do anything before you try. **Some of their behavior in school or other places are away from your influence and that could be one reason school and other outside activities are their favorite topics.**

Some of their more obnoxious moments may be designed for your ears alone, just to get you to argue! Most of the time your reaction should be mellow especially on abstract or distant situations, often their words are to push your button only.

When Todd's father first talked to me, he told me Todd often made rude remarks about his teachers which always resulted in a sharp reprimand from Dad. For example:

Dad: *"You better watch what you say, those teachers work hard to help you and you just give them trouble!"*

Todd: *"Dad, you don't know, they don't care about me, they're just in there for their pay check!"*

Dad: *"Well, you'd better listen to them if you want a paycheck of your own someday."*

The argument is a destructive one, each looking for weaknesses in the other, no winners, no progress, but a little entertainment for Todd.

Todd said he didn't like these arguments, but that's suspicious since he always came back for more. As a matter of fact, his mother told me, *"I just don't get it. Todd deliberately stirs up his Dad."*

Of course, Todd had no intention of being insulting to teachers. That was too dangerous. He just talked about being insulting, maybe as a way of getting out some frustration, and then later as a way of stirring up a little excitement at home.

Being only ten, **Todd might not even know he has a habit of putting down teachers at home, and he may have no idea at all as to why he does it.** If Todd's parents want a change, they need to work with the behavior in front of them not the threat of what he does or might do at school.

We needed some new topics for Todd and his dad to talk about, and they needed to be worked out in advance so Dad was ready with good topics and not easily drawn in to new verbal fencing matches. With just that little change and encouragement for Dad to be alert for chances to compliment and encourage Todd for any good behavior, the family airways began to look better. **Some of the best rules for parents are the ones that just put them on the alert to see and react to the best behavior of their children.**

Helping a Child Explore Alternatives to a Problem

Reflecting a child's statements can help get him or her to a point of exploring alternatives and taking action to solve a problem. It helps when a parent sends messages *"I heard you."* and *"It's all right to feel the way you do."* Then your son or daughter is likely to go beyond letting out feelings to considering, *"What can I do about it?"* or *"What would help?"* because the child has learned that criticism is not likely. A parent helps most by tuning in to the child's level of feeling and energy for the problem.

Is the child looking for alternatives, considering a particular

one, or just letting out emotion? All of these purposes are good. The parent must listen with empathy and react appropriately to give support. If the child is just venting emotion, a helpful parent reflects that, and does not push the child to look for answers or give them.

Lori: *"Mr. Factors is a terrible math teacher! He won't even let you ask a question!"*

Dad: *"That's important in math – to get the problems straightened out before going on."*

Lori: *"Sure. How can I learn if he won't answer the questions?"*

Dad: *"Does he ever review?"*

Lori: *"Oh, sure, he reviews, but it's so fast nobody knows what he's talking about."*

Dad: *"Why don't you go in after class?"* (Whoops, Dad just took a little superior view here. Judy may not be ready for advice. Let's give Dad a second chance.)

Dad: *"Why does he go so fast?"*

Lori: *"Who knows? What a jerk."* (Judy's voice is lower now, running out of steam for this topic)

Dad: *"Some teachers are hard to deal with."*

Venting a little frustration is not necessarily a call for help.

You may feel a little impatient with Dad in this conversation. Why doesn't he help? Couldn't he at least encourage her to go in after class? Or encourage her to speak up insistently in class?

If this is the third complaint about Mr. Factors, Dad might give some of that advice, but I think on the first round he should pass up the temptation to give advice and just let his daughter know he's on her side. How can his daughter feel comfortable and spontaneous in bringing up topics and venting some steam with Dad if he always takes the talk as a project to fix something? Dads love to fix things, especially quickly!

Parents, especially fathers it seems, can be too effi-

ciency-oriented in their conversations with kids. If you told someone you had trouble tying your shoe this morning, would you want them to tell you how to do it? No. As a matter of fact, it would be an insulting implication that you are a complete klutz!

Venting a little frustration is not necessarily a call for help. Remember kids are always on the lookout for what the conversation is saying about them! An offer of help, especially too early, can be offensive because it's a message that says, *"You don't know. Let me take over."*

Here's another child, Dan, complaining for the fifth time about some obnoxious playmates. He's gone by the blowing-off-steam stage, and the comment coming up is an indirect request for some help. The help he gets from Mom is a review of alternatives he suggests. If that doesn't work, and he asks for more help she will give her own advice.

Dan: *"I don't know what to do!"*

Mom: *"What alternatives are there?"* (Children are creative at listing options when they are ready. But if nothing comes up, it may be the problem isn't clear yet and he needs to explore more or just express more opinions and feelings. Perhaps he's ready to try an alternative.)

Dan: *"I'm going to tell those kids to quit bugging me!"*

Mom: *"How do you think they'll react to that?"*

Dan: *"They might stop, but if they don't I'll just ignore them from now on."*

Mom: *"Just ignore them?"*

Dan: *"Yeah, that works every time!"*

Well, it might not work every time, but at least Dan is in control and working on his own problem. Distinguishing different levels of emotion and energy and reacting with the right amount of support requires practice and empathy from the

parent. When in doubt, be reflective and use it questions, but resist the temptation to suggest solutions.

Suggesting Solutions

Parents are always tempted to suggest solutions to problems: *"Why don't you ..." "You should try..." "Don't be so ..."* These statements are well-meaning, but they often strike the listener as pushy and superior.

So in addition to avoiding criticism or blame by using "it" subjects and using questions and reflective statements, we need to add another guideline: **Use solution-suggesting statements carefully, only after all of the problem has been fully expressed.** The purpose is to have the child explore for alternatives, not to have the parent suggest solutions. As an example, look at the temptations in the following conversation.

Pam: *"Life is so depressing. People are so bad."*
Mom: *"I know it gets like that at times."*

Here's a good start. It may seem like a terrible start because of the topic, but the topic is Pam's choice. A terrible start would be for Mom to fall to temptation and disagree right away by saying: *"You shouldn't talk like that; there are a lot of good people in the world!"*

In most conversations between adults, the suggestions for solutions are left out completely.

It would be tempting to make this correction immediately but it's unnecessary—Pam knows her remark is extreme. Also it's a little dishonest on Mom's part because she knows Pam is partly right. Since it's a statement with some potential for agreement, Mom takes the side that puts her a little closer. Let's see how it goes:

Pam: *"It gets like that all the time at school."*
Mom: *"There must be some good times at school."*

Not good. It's too early in the conversation for the implied disagreement, authority, and solution expressed in this nudge.

Let's let Mom take that back and try again.

Mom: *"School's been bad lately, huh?"*

This is better because it's reflective, not argumentative, and without evaluation of who's to blame, it keeps the conversation on a third entity where Pam started it (not her fault, not Mom's). The next remark from Pam is likely to be informative about what the problem is at school. Mom, if careful, will learn a great deal and Pam will have the chance to "get it all out."

In most conversations between adults, the suggestions for solutions are left out completely. You don't end up a conversation with your neighbor, *"So we're agreed you'll cut the hedge at least every two weeks!"* or, *"So don't go roaring off in your car like that, it disturbs everyone!"* With these reactions you would never see your neighbors!

Be satisfied that most conversations with your child, like those with your neighbor, will have little product. Leave out the closing comment in most of your conversations. If you try to be the "winner" in every talk, then you will always have to make a "loser." Frequent "losers" will want to avoid the "game" altogether.

Discuss TV's Content to Practice the Rules of Conversation.

Children and parents need variety from the daily routine and from repetitious topics: friends, school, and hobbies. When Mom and Dad look for topics they could discuss with their sons or daughters, TV programs often show up on the list. Many parents may see TV as an intruder to parental influence, but, in small amounts, it can be a rich source of neutral, lively subjects for conversation, especially when adults and children watch together.

Dad: *What did you think of that show?*

Ashley: *The babies stole the audience! They were cute.*

Dad: *Never cried or needed diaper changes.*

Ashley: *Not very realistic, I guess, but I liked Grandpa talking to the twins.*

Dad: *Babies need to hear a lot of talk to learn.*

TV situations are not threatening because they happen to someone else and the child has as much information as the parent because both watched the same show.

Help your child react to and question TV shows, instead of simply letting him/her be a passive viewer. You have your attitudes and answers to life's questions, and TV, a little TV, can help your child form his/her views, especially when there is someone to listen and ask questions.

Chapter 11

Coaching Social Skills at Home and School

Why are some children likeable? Is it all appearance and "personality?" No. Being "likeable" is made up of specific behaviors, not a permanent characteristic of the person: it's a matter of showing some genuine unselfish liking of others. A person with this attractive habit is often imitated and therefore creates more attractive behavior in the people around him.

The times and places of play are the first opportunities to practice successful social behavior. They also may show a parent the first need a child has for practicing the behaviors that make up social skills and habits. **A young child looking to satisfy his own wants may not understand that he also dispenses social consequences and influences the reactions he gets from others.**

The first social difficulty is usually frequent fighting, grabbing and crying as a result of not understanding how to cooperate with someone else—it either goes his way and he ignores the cooperative behavior of others (there's no problem when I

get what I want!) or it doesn't go his way and he tries to punish the offending companion. Such a "me first" child is usually the first one to be complained about by other children and by teachers and parents.

"Mom, how can I get the kids to like me?"

Being "likable" is a concept even some older children get mixed up. It is easy to think "likeable" is a collection of personal traits. Appearance usually comes first to the mind of a child, then second comes saying clever, cool, or funny things. **The truth of the matter shows up when the child considers who <u>he</u> likes.** Usually, the answer is that he likes people who accept him, admire him, and want to spend time with him—in a word, like <u>him</u>!

If I want to be liked, so do they...

When adults consider the question, they immediately see that part of the answer is that they like people who like them. Do you have an evening free tonight? Who would you like to be with? Someone who likes you. That's an adult insight. A child's view is similar: "Someone I like." It's just that their more self-centered answer doesn't lead to the crucial conclusion that: *"If I want to be liked, so do they, and I should try to supply that liking in my social habits and watch out for being too critical."*

The habits would include asking about the other person, showing some concern, complimenting, showing agreement, giving time and companionship. These are the behaviors we look for when we try to teach a troublesome child about being "good."

Adults who must supervise children with little or no social skills usually try to present a model of good behavior while reprimanding the behaviors they don't want. This could be a workable strategy if the reprimands are very specific and the modeling is done carefully. It seems natural to the adult to target some deserving child, model friendly behavior with that child, and hope that the other more troublesome child will learn by imitating the adult's friendly ways.

The complication is that the needs of the troublesome child have priority over learning good behavior—at least in the mind

of the troublesome child. So the adult behavior to be modeled will must instead be directed toward our problem kid. We will need to catch him being good at something in order to support him and to show him the way to get along with others and be a likeable person.

Being sociable is like many other activities: If you're good at it, you like it, and you tend to do more of it.

Sociability

One mom described the difference between her daughters this way. *"Dianne and her sister Kelly are so different!* ***Kelly can't stop talking and Dianne hardly says a word. It's hard to believe they were raised in the same family!***

"Last week, I took them to a neighborhood birthday party and when I asked them how it went Kelly said, 'It was great! They dropped all these balloons on us and everyone screamed! Sally was there, Ann was there, Betty, Millie, and all the boys, Frank, Donald, David and Cris.'"

When Mom asked Dianne how it went she just said that, *"It was OK. Everyone was just running all over."* And then Kelly said Dianne just stood around.

Being sociable is like many other activities: If you're good at it, you like it, and you tend to do more of it. On the other hand, if you don't get started with others easily, then you will have less practice with others, and there is little chance of any learning and change for the better.

Kelly's focus is on others, she asks a lot of questions and remembers a lot of details about others that she is forever talking about.

Dianne's concern is about her own security. She can't seem to think of anything safe to say. Both girls have habits that perpetuate their attitudes. Kelly talks a great deal, she is loud, and she has learned about the other children. Dianne doesn't talk much, she uses a soft voice, and lack of experience with the others leaves her short on subjects to bring up.

Dianne doesn't have a "problem." She has a quiet style which sometimes makes her feel left out, but she shouldn't be given the extra burden of being told she has something wrong with her. Her parents could give her some extra social ammuni-

tion when going into a social situation. Adults help each other with this kind of priming quite often. *"Remember* (Mom says on the way to her office party with Dad) *my boss, Jane, has that little boat out on the town lake, and she just got back from Florida. Tom bought a car just like ours, and Harold Teak's daughter just made him a grandfather."*

These little bits of information will allow Dad to "go more than half way" in starting some conversation with Mom's co-workers—if he wants to. Dianne needs some help with information too. She may complain that *"No one came over to me at the party,"* but the parental reflex of *"Did you go over to any of them?"* could be left off while providing whatever information might be helpful to Dianne in thinking up something to start a conversation.

Dad doesn't get a lecture on how to correct some defect in himself on the way to Mom's party, he's just provided with a better chance of doing what he wants to do with information about the others. And Dianne doesn't need more criticism either, just some long-term help as the situations come up so that if she is inclined to join in the talk, the detail of thinking of a topic will be easier.

A child who is good at socializing has many friends, they agree with what she wants to do, laugh at the same things, and cooperate on the same tasks. They don't seem to try to please each other, they just do. The notion of being pleasing in order to get along with others may seem a little simpleminded and of little use until pleasing, agreeing, disagreeing, fighting and cooperating are seen as special cases of reward and punishment. Consider, for example, the following conversation I heard when I was visiting a first-grade art class. It took place at a table where three boys were working on pictures.

Eddie: (Pokes Tom) *Don't do it like that, Dum-Dum!*

Tom: *Leave me alone!*

John: *Give me the yellow.*

Eddie: (Reaches for the yellow crayon and pulls it close to himself) *I need it now.*

Teacher: *Eddie, give John the yellow crayon.* (Eddie throws the crayon at John.)

Later Eddie turns to John.

Eddie: *Are you through with the yellow now?*
John: *Yes.* (As John starts to hand over the crayon, Eddie grabs John's hand and digs out the crayon.

What are the special cases of reward and punishment during this art lesson? First, Eddie punished Tom (Don't do it like that, Dum-Dum). Second, Tom tried to punish Eddie (Leave me alone!). Third, Eddie refused John's request for the crayon and later added another punishment by snatching it back when John offered it.

Eddie was a punisher. He looked for things to punish, and if he didn't find them, he would punish good behaviors of others (John's offer of the crayon, for example). **The best way to avoid punishment from Eddie, perhaps the only way, is to avoid Eddie!**

Eddie creates his own social world and probably finds that other children, and people in general, react negatively to him. **To a great extent he controls his own world, he is a model of punishment for others and receives punishment from others who are copying him or just want to even the score.**

For Eddie to learn a new social style, someone will have to reward Eddie for any little acceptable response, and that person will have to be a good model as well. It's a tough assignment for a parent. The reflex reaction to such a nasty child is to react in kind, but Eddie's mom will need to learn to watch for Eddie's infrequent successes and coach his social game by encouraging the rare moments when he acts properly.

Eddie's mother will also have to provide as little attention as possible when he punishes others. If he uses verbal abuse, she might try ignoring all but the worst of it. But remember that ignoring has to have the partner of "catch 'em being good"!

There is no quick fix for Eddie's problem, and we'll have to settle for small successes in the midst of some not very pleasant situations. With close attention Eddie's parents might find that certain situations are better than others. Eddie's fatigue, hunger, or time when his parents are busy may be the

worst moments, while family times after meals but before Eddie is too tired are the best times to look for good Eddie-behavior to encourage. These good moments might be the most effective time for his parents to show a good example as well.

The Games Children Play

"Referees are fun"

"Mom! Mark won't let me watch my program!"
"Mark, leave your brother alone. Steven gets to watch his program now."
"It's a dumb program, and we can see the last of it later, I'm turning it to my show!"
"Mom! Mark changed the channel!"
"Mark, you come out here and help me and leave Steven alone!"
"Mark pushed me!"
"I have to get around you! Mom told me to go out there, so I have to push!"
"You two cut that out! Mark get out here right now! If I have to come in there..."

In this game, Mom is referee. She is the third party the kids go to for judgment calls, penalties, and control of the game. It's safer than regular conflict because you can count on Mom to call a halt to the escalation. By the way, as all Little League and soccer mothers know, referees are always 50% wrong. **So if you lose you can always blame the referee—what a comfortable way to pass some time!**

Why don't adults play this game? Sometimes they do, of course, it's just that the third party referee can't be counted on to keep the game going or to intervene when the conflict gets hot. Once the referee leaves the game or fails to play the role of protector, the players are on their own and start negotiating.

With children the negotiation will be one-sided with a bias toward the bigger one, and they may go back to how the unproductive behavior started the game in the first place.

Most referees are tempted to coach now and then and parents are no different. *"Mark, why don't you let Steven watch his program and then you can watch yours, and tomorrow at this time you will get to choose."* Coach or arbitrator is more comfortable for a parent than referee. Referees give penalties and get blamed for everything wrong.

If the suggested solution is rejected, Mom could always end the game by removing the source of the argument—she could turn off the TV. The danger here is that one of the combatants may like that outcome. So calling off the game needs a promise that either side can have the TV for their half of the time by agreeing to Mom's solution. He can't have his sibling's half, during that time the TV is off until both sides reach a compromise.

The resolution here can't be perfect for the kids. But the goal is to get Mom out of the referee role, the less-than-perfect solution can be fixed any time the brothers want to fix it. Many of these games become much less troublesome to parents when they identify the game and adjust their reactions to make sure the games are reasonable and fair.

Coach or arbitrator is more comfortable for a parent than referee.

"I'll bet you can't make me happy"

This game also pulls the parents into the problems of their children when the children should be taking responsibility for themselves.

"Mom, what can I do, I'm bored."
"Why don't you work on your puzzle?"
"I've done everything but the sky part, and that's too hard."
"Well, how about helping me outside?"
"That's just work."
"Well, you might as well get your homework done."
"I don't have to do it yet"
"Well, why don't you..."

Many parents recognize this conversation as one that could go on and on. There's a little attention from Mom as long as no suggestion is right. As a matter of fact, if a suggestion were accepted, the game would be over.

What would you do if a weekend guest with extra time started this conversation with you? Suppose old hard-headed Uncle Harry and his friend, Al, came over and started this game with you? **You would probably make a few suggestions, and then since they are adults, you would think it was time for the old coots to entertain themselves.**

Parents can't win the I-bet-you-can't-make-me-happy game, they just have to quit and let children get the experience of taking control of their own time.

"My problem is your problem"

This is a common children's game that will develop later in teenage years into "It's your fault because you're my parent(s)." **As with many of these games, frankly stating the fair truth may stop the game and allow some real progress.**

"This homework is due tomorrow!"
"Well, you'd better get at it."
"Where's some paper?"
"In the desk."
"I already looked there."
"Why don't you try upstairs?"
"Mom! It's supposed to be down here! Could you go look?"
"Hold it, Sam, your homework is your responsibility, don't make it my problem.

This game has the flavor of the I'll-bet-you-can't-make-me-happy game. In both cases parental attention looks suspiciously like the reward that's prolonging the game, and it's time to leave Sam alone for awhile to search for solutions on his own.

"You're the parent, let me tell you your job."

Ray: *"I'd like to take those self-defense classes, Dad.*

Dad: *Good exercise. And it could come in handy.*

Ray: *Well, the ones I want to take are in Freetown.*

Dad: *Freetown? That's almost an hour from here.*

Ray: *Sam is in the one here and I don't like him.*

Dad: *I can't drive 2 hours every Saturday because you don't like Sam.*

Ray: *You're suppose to help me, there's no other way.*

Dad: *You could take the lessons here.*

Ray: *You're the Dad, you're supposed to take me!*

Dad: *Ray, I'll be glad to take you to the lessons here, but I have a life on Saturdays, too. I'm not driving to Freetown.*

Ray's game brings up the important notion that Dad has the right to be selfish at times. Ray's tactic of telling Dad what his responsibilities are isn't working and he may change the game to:

"If you serve me, I won't make you feel guilty."

Ray: *David's father drives him to Freetown.*

Dad: *Well, I don't have that much time.*

Ray: *Time for your own son?*

Dad: *Ray, don't start that. You know I spend a lot of time with you on our projects.*

Well, this is not going well for Ray and if he doesn't think of a good argument fast, he's going to have to take lessons locally. Ray may have to start yet a new game

"I'm not responsible, you are guilty for my mistakes."

Ray: *Well, don't blame me if I get in a fight with Sam.*

Dad: *What?*

Ray: *You're making me take the lessons here, so if I get into trouble it's your fault.*

Dad: *Ray, You are responsible for what you do. If the situation with Sam is that bad, maybe you should decide to skip the lessons.*

Ray is almost out of ammunition for this argument and is in danger of having to show responsibility and some consideration for Dad. He can't have his own way, and like the rest of us, he resents having to compromise and make some extra effort to get along. What tactic is left?

"You're not right, because...because"

Ray: *Dad, it's not that far over there.*

Dad: *It's the other side of the interstate!*

Ray: *The lessons here are not as good.*

Dad: *You haven't tried any yet.*

Ray: *They might be more money here.*

Dad: *Call and find out.*

Is Ray going to agree now? Probably not. After asking Dad to make the call, bringing up Sam again, and getting out a map to show Dad he's wrong, he may call. Then, if Dad agrees on the price, he may start the lessons when he realizes Dad is not going to Freetown.

The key here is Dad's firmness for his own welfare without attacking Ray with, *"You're inconsiderate, irresponsible, selfish, etc."* Dad sticks to the issues, not Ray's personal traits.

"If you really loved me, you would serve me."

Here's a game that is similar to the my-problem-is-your-problem game with a little extra pull on the guilt strings of Dad or Mom.

"Dad, I need those shoes!"
"Ralph, I told you. You have a pair of running shoes one pair is enough."
"But these are different. Ed's dad got him a pair."
"I said one pair is enough it's too much money."
"Ed's dad said they're worth it for his son!"
"Ralph, don't run that guilt trip on me, I'm the guy who bought you the first pair remember?"

Calling Ralph on his attempt to blame his dad for his troubles will not stop this argument, but when Dad recognizes the game, he can keep the proper view of the talk and not let his son get control of his emotions.

Have the reasons (current consequences) for the game been carefully identified? If the answer here is difficult, perhaps you haven't looked far enough. Possibly some chain or group of behaviors is performed before the consequences occurs. For example, complaining about school only results in the parents' suggestion of what to do about homework, which then gives opportunity for procrastination about it and then the game begins. The complaint is a secondary means to the child's goal—a step along the way. Consider the child who fights and complains about his siblings, in order to get his parent to referee, and then separate them. He now has a short entertainment of "Referees are fun" followed by the room to himself.

Listening During the Game

Good parental listening skills are important in handling these games that children play. A quick review of Chapter 10 may help. When the conversation starts, look at your son or daughter rather that a TV screen or newspaper. Turn and face him or her so that there is no impression that you will miss

what's really going on. These physical features of your attention let him know that you're paying attention and are not likely to be fooled by a game.

Feeding back what your child just said is a good habit during these conversations. Let him know that you heard what he said by repeating it.

Avoid suggesting solutions in these games, they only lead to make-me-happy or my-problem-is-yours. Also, suggesting solutions makes you sound superior and tempts your child to counter with something different just to stay even.

Take up the habit of asking questions in a form that is not threatening and don't try to "win." Parents who frequently try to win by getting their son or daughter to say they'll try harder, be more responsible, not be bad any more, or promise to do better, may feel some progress has been made.

But every time you make a winner you have to make a loser and the next conversation is likely to be more confrontational as the child tries to improve his record.

Chapter 12

Caution! Special Behaviors Require Special Coaching!

Swimming coaches and basketball coaches face different problems. And sometimes, as parents encounter special behaviors, they'll need special approaches to their coaching and teaching job. What makes some behaviors special? Usually the intense emotions concern behaviors that are not completely under the control of the child or the parent but are partly determined by what's happening to the child.

The Basic Three: Eating, Sleeping, and Toilet Training

The basic three are in troublesome territory because parents have limited control, limited information and a strong desire for everything to go well for the sake of their child's health. The three are such natural and necessary behaviors you would think they would be the easiest for parents to teach and children to learn.

Since almost all adults learn the basic three, we know the job is always accomplished. Why is it,then, that the basic three are

often the basic troubles for parents? As all experienced parents know, eating, sleeping, and elimination have special characteristics beyond just getting energy, rest and essentials for health. Here are six aspects of the basic three to keep in mind.

1. The basic three are somewhat out of the control of parents, you can't directly force someone to eat, sleep, or use the bathroom.

2. The only direct information about the need for food, sleep, or elimination comes from the child and is not directly observable by others.

3. The behaviors are somewhat out of the control of the child, as well as the parent. Other conditions, deprivations and feelings enter in. A child cannot feel hungry on demand or sleep any time that request comes up.

4. The basic three are partly driven by even more obscure conditions, experiences and habits that may seem irrelevant. Even with us adults, our eating, sleeping, and bathroom activities are related, in a way not completely understood, to coffee, tea, excitement, boredom, depression, too little or too much exercise, the need to escape an unpleasant situation or thought, or worries and fears—just to name a few.

5. Cultural taboos are emphasized in the basic three. Mistakes here produce the most wrath, embarrassment, and guilt. Under that pressure, children learning the basic three are somewhat at the mercy of the conditions mentioned above which are outside their control. Parents can help by controlling daily experiences, diet, and deprivations, but rules with consequences must be handled very carefully with the basic three because it is tempting to make demands on children who are too young. With children who may not be developed enough to

perform, the risk of mistakes, disappointments and lasting confrontations is very high.

6. Being somewhat private activities, the basic three also comprise the last bastion of control of one's own life and it's the last place we are likely to tolerate interference. One theory of anorexia is that the person needs to prove some control of at least part of her life. As one daughter said to me, *"They* (parents, relatives, teachers, and nearly everyone else) *tell me what to wear, when to wear it, when to get up, play, work, and go to bed. But they can't make me eat. At least I control that! And I'll prove it, I won't eat anything!"*

For the most common family situations, a parent's strongest strategy is just engineering the environment.

Eating

Children can eat or not eat for fun, adventure, attention, "control" of the situation, or to "win" in a power struggle with Mom or Dad. For the most common family situations, a parent's strongest strategy is just engineering the environment.

Limit eating to what is in the house and provided at the table, leaving the choices as much as possible to the child. Most children select a good diet overall but also make plenty of mistakes deviating from what is good for them along the way—the same pattern you find in us adults. To highlight this area of behavior if there's no real problem yet is to tread on dangerous territory for no good reason. **Many families have used the family mealtimes as their representative complaint of trouble. The atmosphere there extends into the other family activities. So any extra unjustified confrontation is just not in the best interest of the family.**

You could decide that your daughter can't have dessert until she's finished the food on her plate, but this might be ineffective if she is allowed snacks later while watching TV. But allowing alternative freebies is no sin unless it weakens the usefulness of an important rule. You might remove these alternative freebies and find that your daughter still just doesn't care about the

dessert option. Then you should look carefully at the rule and the level of performance it requires.

If you are going to make a tougher rule, you must **be sure that the goal is worth the effort, and that the performance required is well within range of your child's abilities.** Maybe the step (to clean up all food served) is too big and one not even required of adults. Possibly we need an easier rule that limits choices to what is available.

The goal is for the child to pay attention to his or her own body cues. If time and external demands come to control eating and body cues of hunger are ignored, the stage is set for trouble.

Sleeping

Sleeping problems can be a whole different level of anxiety for parents. While many adults hold easily to a sleeping pattern, it is usually an individual one and frequent disruptions of it are tolerated week by week.

A child deserves the same flexibility. Painful as it may be after a full day of demanding parenting, a child's need for sleep is still a product of many variables, and he just may not be ready on time. However, if bed, bedtime, and isolation in the bedroom have not been used in negative negotiations during the day, sleeping will be welcomed at least as often as it is for adults. **The cautions on using sleeping, naps, and bedtime as a time-out are discussed in Chapter 9. Remember the price is likely to be paid at bedtime.**

Be sure that the goal is worth the effort, and that the performance required is well within range of your child's abilities.

A child's unpredictable bedtime behavior may be a problem only in the mind of the parent and then developed from parental reaction into a problem. Better to look first at the diet and the exercise that creates the need for sleep.

Establish a pleasant routine of bath and reading. Then use the routine regularly, letting the time of the routine vary as needed. Snacks and drinks just before bed are a particularly important part of the diet related to sleep. Sugar and caffeine will work against your goal of a pleasant routine at bedtime. A child of four may get four to five times as much caffeine from a coke on a per-pound-of-body-weight basis. If a cola or chocolate milk

can disturb the sleep of a 150-pound adult, think how concentrated that amount is in a small child!

Perhaps another behavior page from the exercise of Part 1 is in order here. Drinks, particularly those with sugar or, please forbid it, caffeine, should be recorded in the behavior sheet along with time of day, other eats, the day's exercise, and the discussion of problems and worries in the evening. Also add a place in the chart for TV, both amount and type. The parent's best hope for some control over sleeping is a continued behavior page.

Sleep problems can be influenced by too much or too little exercise during the day. So the first point is not to approach the problem as if it could be influenced by consequences but rather to approach it as if it could be influenced by other behaviors and conditions under the control of the parents. How do adults deal with this problem?

Toilet Training

Most psychologists consider toilet training a crucial childhood experience. Theories back to Freud and before him have discussed the symbolic nature of the behavior. In the practical situation, toilet training acquires some of its importance from the natural reaction of parents to the disgusting outcomes of mistakes. **The emotions are in the nature of the parent and not yet the child.**

Despite all the parental anxiety and concern for doing this training right, almost every person arrives at adulthood with these behaviors learned! **Very few children make it to four without great progress in this area.** Mistakes occur all the way to the teens when the "child" is distracted or excited, but regardless of the parental method, overall we have about 100% success—not something we can say about many of the projects of this book! **The promise of this inevitable success should keep parental emotions low.**

Starting too soon with many mistakes and disappointments creates the risk of bigger problems and confrontations over something not completely controllable by parent or child.

The mistakes produce the emotion so it would be best to maximize the possibilities of rewards for success. Fist you need a "behavior page" to put over the diaper pail. In the charting

part, put the hours of the day across the top and note every time a diaper goes in the pail. Label the row for the days and leave a space for "remarks."

By using 1's and 2's to indicate wet and dirty diapers, you can get some notion of when the best time for training would be. **When the training starts don't give up the chart; you'll need it to note successes and reward the child.** The best part of this reward is going to be your reaction, but you may want to include a treat for success. At first you'll need to give encouragement just for staying on the toilet, later, the rewards can come for successes.

If there has already been some emotion over this training and your child is resisting you may need to start with a new situation and gradually move the training back to the bathroom. For example, you might begin by rewarding your child for sitting on a portable potty in the bedroom, then the hall, then the bathroom. Keep the praise up, the emotion down, and the tolerance high. **Remember that all the adults you know learned this, we don't have to meet anybody's schedule here.**

Bed-Wetting

Occasional bed-wetting is quite normal for children under the age of 10. Pull-ups or big child diapers at night may have to serve as a temporary solution. If bed-wetting seems too frequent for the age of your child, it can be a medical problem because certain infections of the bladder and urinary tract produce uncontrolled urination.

The first place to start on this problem is at your physician's office. When you are sure that a physical ailment is not the problem, you could use a bed-wetting alert system which is usually very successful. Two pads of metal foil separated by a plastic fiber lining are placed under the bottom sheet of the child's bed. Bed-wetting begins with only slight leakage. **When the lining becomes even a little damp, an alarm buzzer is activated.** At this stage, there is still time for the child to wake up and go to the bathroom.

Over a few weeks this alarm clock for bed-wetting can teach a child to wake up and use the bathroom. It is a battery-operated device so there is no danger of shock, and it has been very effective. One source for this device is the Sears Home

Healthcare catalog. Although Sears no longer has a general catalog, they do offer this specialty catalog at 1-800-326-1750.

Parents must get up with the alarm too. As with most child-rearing problems, a gadget by itself will not solve problems. You may have to help the child shake out the cobwebs to be awake enough to find the bathroom. A little support for a job well done and you're back to bed without a big event. **The effort is worth it because bed-wetting can complicate other difficulties—fears of sleeping, staying overnight with relatives or friends, embarrassment, and shyness.**

If the overall amount of attention is too little, they will use a little bad behavior to make up the shortfall.

Attention-Getting Behaviors

Parents usually suspect that some of a child's bad behavior occurs because of the attention it attracts, and their first question about this situation should be, *"Why can't my child get the attention he or she needs through other behaviors?"*

It may be that some children only receive attention and the consideration of the family when they draw the attention to themselves by acting up. Other children may have developed other solutions to their attention-getting problem but if the overall amount of attention is too little, they will use a little bad behavior to make up the shortfall. If the plan works for the child, we might call the child "spoiled."

The Spoiled Child has a found a way to control his parents' behavior by punishing them with bad behavior or the threat of it. "Spoiled" is a catch-all term describing many behaviors, some of which may not be bad. The behavior a child uses to get this label is usually embarrassing, exasperating, or just plain annoying to the parents. He uses it because it works. Calculated whining and demanding must be handled without blaming the child by saying he or she is "spoiled."

The way out of the problem lies in the direction of rewarding the little good behavior there is in a child who may not be very likable or deserving. Added to the "catch 'em being good" rule should be an extinction rule for obnoxious behavior.

Extinction refers to a rule about withholding consequences. In this case, it would be not giving in to obnoxious behavior. Single out one aspect of the "spoiled" behavior and write up an extinction rule about it. For example, if the child begins to cry when he is about to be deprived of something, eliminate the possibility of any change in that decision.

Notice the rule singles out crying and does not include any other part of what is called being "spoiled." Getting angry, pouting, and other obnoxious behaviors are not part of the rule. For these other behaviors you'll just make your on-the-spot reactions, dealing with them as the situation requires. That on-the-spot decision may include holding to the decision that produced the bad behavior, but the crying rule still remains a special case where crying is always ineffective in getting a reversal.

The reason for this separation of strategies is that an extinction rule is hard to follow and if it is too broad, it will force you to look for too many behaviors at once and consistency will suffer. The small separate rule is more likely to encourage you because any change in the bad behavior highlighted in the rule, in this case, crying, will stand out as a success. Knowing that the extinction rule really works, you better your chances of holding to the rule in the next situation.

If obnoxious behavior was "required" then obnoxious behavior was learned.

Remember a spoiled child did not get that way because too much was provided. It was the rules that provided it. If obnoxious behavior was "required" then obnoxious behavior was learned.

Many children of families with small incomes are spoiled and many children with the benefits of wealthy families are not spoiled.

Some parents have told me that they very carefully avoided giving in to bad behavior but ended up with a problem child nevertheless. I think many of these parents did, occasionally, avoid supporting bad behavior. Problems developed anyway because most of the time no consistency was used.

Without a clear positive or negative message about what is right, a child casts around for solutions to his needs and frustrations. What will he find to be effective? Over the weeks and months of growing from a one-year-old to a ten-year-old he

will develop his own theory of how to handle life. It may be acting "spoiled," "angry," or "nice."

Without much feedback, this will be mostly accidental and parents have come to me bewildered as to how a problem developed. Without some specific plan and effort to support good behavior, a child needs only a few unfortunate experiences to end up with troublesome behaviors.

Many parents find saying "Please use your words," helpful with a fussing child.

Crying, Dropping, and Throwing are behaviors that have many things in common. They are directed at the parents and maintained by attention from the parents—justified or unjustified. And they go away as the child grows up or at least they are replaced by more "adult" manipulations that attract the focus of attention.

Crying is the legitimate way an infant attracts attention to needs. As a child leaves the toddler stage, crying still plays an acceptable role in emotional expression and communication. It's the manipulating part at the later ages that is troublesome.

Your kitchen chart can come in handy for these behaviors. Keep a record of when the problem occurs, what happened right before the outburst, and what happened right after the outburst.

You may have already suspected that part of the crying is a result of fatigue late in the day or before nap-time. You may discover that the bad behavior only comes up for, or is used on, certain members of the family—Mom gets the crying, Dad gets the pouting.

Now a little examination of what often happens next and a possible change may become obvious. Dad needs to watch his reactions to pouting—even teasing may be a reward. Mom and Dad need to watch how the child plays them against each other. There may also be a particular circumstance or time of day when the child's bad behavior and the parents' mistakes are most likely. Many parents find saying *"Please use your words,"* helpful with a fussing child.

For the dropping and throwing part of attention-getting, we will need to emphasize reactions to good behaviors and as little reaction as possible to bad ones. We also may need a "count-out or time-out" rule as described at the end of Chapter 9.

Behavior During Illness. Every parent knows that a sick child is the source of the most upsetting and helpless feelings in parenthood. The situation changes all the rules. It is a time of special care for the child but also special care for the ground rules of the family. Everyone wants to make the patient comfortable. With children, particularly, the unusual nature of the situation has to be emphasized because there are dangers here for long-term effects from the illness experience.

We don't want her to learn that special advantages are available whenever she says she is ill. This has the potential to be one of those unfortunate experiences that shape bad social habits to come. **References to illness are not always verifiable—a headache or upset stomach is a hard claim to check out. Even the child may not be able to tell that he is exaggerating and using certain claims to control attention for his parents.**

Again, positively stated rules that allow the parent to love and attend the child for good reasons are a part of the solution. Also, some of the less attractive but logical consequences of being ill might be emphasized whenever there is reason for suspicion. For example, if a child claims to have a headache and so wants to watch television instead of doing homework, perhaps your first response should be that he lie down and take a nap instead.

Reasonable suggestions should become consistent and prompt reactions to a child beginning to use illness for beneficial effects. If a child says he has a headache, it is probably best to act as if he does. A long argument about whether or not he really has a headache only increases the probability that we might be giving attention for bad behavior. **But having a headache shouldn't mean that all demands are off and the child gets to do whatever he or she wants.** It should mean acting reasonably to reduce the headache—rest, quiet, only reasonable food.

If you are wondering if the illnesses are real, it's time for a chart similar to that described in the crying habit section.

The "Linus" Syndrome of Thumb and Blanket. Thumb sucking, like the use of a comforter such as a favorite blanket, serves the purpose of security but, with time, can also develop

into an attention-getting device. Parents who feel the habit has gone on too long should remember that, with years, it will almost certainly go away. So the question is whether or not to hurry the process along. A little soul-searching may determine whether the problem is with the child or in the mind of the parent. Sometimes parents will say, *"It just bothers me that he(she) is still doing that!"* **If the problem is in the mind of the beholder, perhaps it should be dealt with there.**

Breaking the thumb and/or blanket habit is a stressful process at best and may be downright traumatic. If something is to be done, emphasis ought to be on positive support for activities that require ignoring the blanket and thumb for awhile.

Improvement without new emotional problems is almost impossible if reprimands and discouragement for using the comforter are in the plan. Usually the child will latch onto some new way for dealing with stress, either choosing to be alone more often, or using some tactic of defense such as crying, pouting, or throwing tantrums until assured that everything is under (the child's) control.

Tantrums. When a child who occasionally throws tantrums makes a request, parents must make a careful decision. **As every parent knows, the decision to deny the request should not be altered by a tantrum. But often a less clear reaction gets parents into hotter water.** The request from an explosive child may tempt the parents to put off a confrontation with, *"I'll think about it,"* or *"We'll have to wait until your father* (or mother) *comes home."* This sets a long and risky period when a tantrum is likely. For the moment the request has been denied, but it is done in a weak way that tempts the child to fight for what he or she wants—plenty of time to try out a tantrum along with other obnoxious behavior.

Also, putting off the child leaves him with nothing to do for the moment. It takes experience and creativity to put aside one line of activity and take up another while waiting for an answer from the parental powers. Instead of switching to a new activity, the childish thing to do is cling to the present direction and push for closure. **Nagging is followed by complaining, and then frustration and attack, and then the whole tantrum.**

Another argument for prompt decisions is that parents are

less likely to give in to early mild tantrums. Such holding out until bad behavior gets worse may not be constructive. You may be building in the wrong direction and inadvertently encouraging the child to respond at a higher (louder) level.

Delays in decisions and giving in to small tantrums develop the childish willingness to try to manipulate others by making them miserable.

Fears. One of the major difficulties in dealing with unreasonable fears in children is that adults forget that fears are also behaviors. Fears are the result of experience, followed by consequences, and observed by others. Of course fears also exist within the child, and they deserve our sympathetic understanding. **So while a parent is sleeping with a frightened child, sitting with one who is afraid of the dark, or carrying a child who is afraid of dogs, a gradual removal of these accommodations needs to be in the plan. But an abrupt, cold turkey, approach is not in order.** Remember it's the child's reality that counts.

Talking, threatening, or using the abrupt sink-or-swim technique will only cause terror and distrust.

Remember that fears are not necessarily rational and rationality (talking them out of it) will not be very effective. Many fears are conditioned reactions from past traumatic experiences, and this conditioning is not a rational process. If Pavlov's dogs had been rational, they would have ignored the bell and saved their spit until the food arrived! Their salivation was not done in order to get the food as a reward, the food was always presented after the bell. So even talking dogs would not have been talked out of anticipating what had always happened on previous occasions.

The problem of fears calls for a gradual change in the situation. For example, fear of the dark will have to start with light, which is gradually placed farther away or made dimmer. **This kind of fading procedure over weeks coupled with lots of support and compliments for small success can reduce the problem—such as just a night-light or small table light left on.**

Talking, threatening, or using the abrupt sink-or-swim

technique will only cause terror and distrust.

Warning: Fears first developed from scary experiences can be accidentally encouraged with too much attention. By maintaining the fear with extra attention and accommodation, we now have a whole new problem to be treated as we did the tantrums above. What at first was motivated by love and was an acceptable way of helping a child through some difficult and scary circumstances can become a parental habit that builds unwanted behavior.

Many fears that are viewed as acquired from unfortunate experiences, develop from parental behavior. A child punished by being forced to stay in a room alone may very well come to fear being alone, or fear being put to bed if in other parts of the day being put to bed was a punishment. Such punishments can't be undone, but they can give the parent a better understanding of childhood fears and raise concerns about the nature of future punishments.

When a specific fear is the problem, we might ask whether the object or situation can be easily avoided. If a child is afraid of the dark, is it OK to leave a light on? The opposite strategy of forcing the feared object or situation on the child is usually not effective. Dragging a kicking and screaming child up to a dog in an effort to "get him to understand" that most dogs are nice, only makes him fear you as well as dogs!

Strategies require effort. So the first question to ask about a troublesome behavior is whether or not the problem is serious enough to require attention. If not, then your reactions should be carefully selected to give no particular attention or consequence to it. Most childhood fears fade away naturally as a result of varying degrees of contact with the feared situation. Parents should keep in mind that time is a healer, if there is no attention-getting aspect in the parents' reaction to maintain the fear.

Compulsions and fidget behavior. Nail-biting, hair-twirling, nose-picking, and lip-biting are usually maintained partly by parental attention and partly by the absence of something else to do. They are behaviors that fill up time and are occasionally rewarded accidentally by parents.

However, fidget behavior can be more complicated than

plain fidgeting. It's fidgeting with a long-term commitment. It happens in the slow, somewhat boring moments of life and almost everyone does it. At first it can be just the random squirming and wiggling of a child. To a child we say, *"Stop that fidgeting!"* Later on, the little habits develop into hair-twirling, scratching, or ballpoint pen-clicking (for us older ones). Even eating and drinking can develop into fidget (fill-up-the-dull-time) behaviors.

A well-known psychology experiment concerning fidget behavior has been repeated many times. A laboratory white rat is trained to press a lever for food. He soon learns that the food is only given after long intervals—about two minutes. In the meantime there is little to do but wait. What to do, what to do? A water bottle is available, but the rat has water all the time in his home cage so he is not thirsty. But, faced with nothing to do, he drinks. It is not in the rat's nature, or ours, to do absolutely nothing. With humans doing nothing is even embarrassing. So we pretend to read (or something) in waiting rooms, in restaurants, and at bus stops. Many of us wouldn't go to a restaurant alone without something to read.

So the rat drinks. But not just sips. He may drink up to two times his body weight in water while waiting for the intervals to pass! Since neither rat nor human has a bladder that big, you can see that the experiment requires regular cleaning chores. All that's needed to stop our little waterholic is to shorten the waiting time—down from 2 minutes to 30 seconds. With the shorter interval all the excess water drinking goes away. When payoffs come more often, there is work to be done, and our rat has no time for fooling around!

Now we have two possible explanations of frequent, repeated, annoying behaviors—they could be fidget behaviors or they could be attention-getting. The difference is important.

For attention-getting behaviors we need a strategy that reduces the attention for that behavior, but for fidget behaviors we need to also reduce the boredom, the down-time, the dull moments. Take a little extra time for reflection when you first see the beginnings of a "nervous" habit or a "compulsive" behavior.

Rewarding other behavior that is desirable will be a good

strategy for either fidget or attention-getting behaviors, but the reaction to the annoying behavior itself should be a careful one. For attention-getting activities you certainly want to reduce attention, but if it's a fidget behavior, there is all the more reason to see that support and opportunity for more acceptable behavior occur more often. The child's reaction is to down-time—the lack of anything to do. At least the child's view is that there is nothing to do. You wouldn't want to get into a I'll-bet-you-can't-make-me-happy game, but clearly some increase in action is called for.

Rewarding other behavior that is desirable will be a good strategy for either fidget or attention-getting behaviors

Fidget behaviors can quickly develop into attention-getting or other reward-getting behaviors. **Now that boredom has brought on the behavior, what reward will it attract?**

"Jumping on" fidgeting behavior can be a dangerous parental habit. If the bad behavior thrives on attention, the parent will need a long remedial strategy later. If the behavior is not important let's not make it so. Instead let's look to the situation for a way of enriching the moments. **Any smoker or heavy drinker will recognize the fidgeting aspect of their habit** and tell you that the worst time of temptation is during the low moments—not just the depressing ones, but the boring ones, also.

Your first question about a compulsive behavior then, should be, "Is the behavior a problem serious enough to warrant <u>any</u> strategy at all?" Your second question should be, "Is there anything about the current reactions that could alleviate tension and add enrichment to the situation to "squeeze out" moments of temptation for fidgeting behavior?" Along this line, you might consider what activities you want in the situation and what opportunities there are for such behaviors.

Another strategy frequently used is to reward the lack of compulsive behavior. For example, one mother told me she promised a dollar to her son if he could refrain from nail-biting long enough so that his nails would need cutting. **Because this demand seemed a bit too large for a first step, her son was also given a nickel for each one of his fingernails that needed trimming because it had been allowed to grow.**

Such a direct contingency upon a compulsive behavior must

be used carefully. There is always a tendency to do more than state the rule, and nagging ensures that some attention will be connected to mistakes. As with any attention-getting behavior, the child's view is that he or she is not getting enough attention and has now found a behavior that seems to alleviate the deprivation. **If we now come along with a new strategy that sees to it that the child's usual solution for getting attention will not work, then we need to be on the lookout for a newly designated behavior to trigger our special attention.** That new way to appropriate attention should be one the child can and will accomplish.

Rhythmic Habits. Rhythmic habits are sometimes symptoms of severe childhood disorders. Autistic children often engage in repetitive behaviors for hours and also exhibit developmental disabilities and impairments in mental function. **Normal children and adults have rhythmic habits, too.** Tapping a pencil, swinging a foot, and rocking to music are common pastimes. These may annoy parents but are probably too trivial to merit a strategy beyond ignoring.

When the habit has become troublesome, most parents can remember the beginning of it as a less frequent event. **This can be a case of parents trying to fix a non-problem which now becomes one.** A behavior that started as just fidgeting became a gimmick for attention, and then a way to express exasperation at the parents. "Getting through to" the parents now gets a reprimand, a kind of attention in a situation where positive attention seems unlikely to the child.

An occasional correction or request to stop the annoying habit is not likely to do much harm if the emotional reaction of the parent can be kept in check.

Mom: (Rich has been banging his foot on the chair leg at dinner for three minutes) *Rich, stop kicking the chair. It's a bother when we're eating.*

Rich: *I can't help it.*

Mom: (Still in a very quiet tone) *Well, if you can't help it, you'll have to eat in the small chair*

with your feet on the floor. Did you finish your picture before dinner?

Rich: (Still kicking the chair) *Yes, it's a boat.*

Mom: *A boat. I'd like to see it after we're finished. Please don't kick.*

Rich: *I told you I can't help it.*

Mom: (Still very calmly) *If you continue, you'll have to be in the little chair. That's one.*

Rich may have to go to three and then to the little chair this first time. Later, if he doesn't develop this habit as a ploy to get Mom going, he'll stop or at least keep his excess energy habits at a tolerable level. Mom is right to provide another direction for Rich's focus. These other topics will have to become a part of Mom's habits before the chair kicking or other problem starts. **If Mom only comes up with these interests when Rich acts up, you can see where this will lead.**

Taking All that "Guff"

One obvious characteristic of a child's "bad disposition behavior" is that it generally reduces requests from the parent. It's true the parent can silence the child or keep him from acting up by taking a threatening pose that implies punishment if the child does anything obnoxious, but of course the child learns and uses the same tactics. Since he is a less powerful figure he must use them in a more subtle way.

I have named the child's threats and lack of compliance his version of "Guff" because some parents I have worked with said they had a habit of giving in rather than "take all that guff."

Sam uses guff to put his mother off and to get out of some undesirable request for work. But his behavior also is a result of the fact that the request is just work, that is, he is using guff to avoid doing some job because the job itself doesn't seem to pay off.

By this time you may be getting a little tired of the idea that everything has to pay off, but remember that what we

mean by "payoff" in many cases is the honest expression of appreciation or admiration or support when something good or helpful is done. Material reward is not always necessary. In your job you probably do many things because you have come to believe that is the right way to do it or that it will please someone. You did not do it necessarily for the money.

Guff is usually a reaction to too little payoff. Guff is continuous because it attracts attention of its own. Now if it also works in getting out of some requests, we are well on the way to building ourselves a real problem.

Why don't you try guff with your boss? Because it won't work, I would bet. And also with a good boss, it never occurred to you to use guff because there is consistent support for doing the job—pay, appreciation, or some combination of those.

So both Hal and his parents usually engage in some bad disposition behavior or guff. Hal's parents try to bring about some effort from Hal by coercion and Hal avoids that effort—if he can—because it is straight coercion without a significant reward.

When Hal is using guff, he often exposes the situation quite well by saying, *"Oh, why should I do that anyway?"* The statement is pure guff intended to stop some request from Mom or Dad, but, incidentally, it asks a very good question: *"What does Hal get out of it?"*

One difficulty is that it is much easier to attempt to coerce some behavior than to plan and provide support for it—as any boss would tell us. Providing reasonable, positive consequences requires planning and sometimes a new point of view that at least includes activities for more social approval.

Chapter 13

Teaching School Skills

Comfort and success in school are crucial ingredients in childhood happiness and in parenthood happiness. If you can help your child be comfortable and successful in school, what a gift that is!

A new stage of development in your child's self-concept begins with school. Success with lessons provides more than confidence in academic abilities, it influences feelings of competence and usefulness outside of school as well.

Parents of students have a new job beyond helping with homework. **Parental advice for good school skills and parental efforts to put the learning to use at home will boost the child's confidence and attitude.**

Parent of a Child to the Parent of a Student

Our first years in school shaped our early definition of who we were. Comparisons with our schoolmates fixed a lasting impression of them and it shaped a judgment of ourselves as well before we were 10. Parents who have attended their own school reunion, after a few years, know it can be threatening. **The reunion seems to measure us against that old bench-**

mark again. This common reaction to reunions demonstrates how important help in school is to a child.

We all know the first school days are a big adjustment for the child, but they are also a big adjustment for the parents. This is probably the first time parents are required to share

1. Child-rearing attitudes
2. Influence through reinforcement
3. Control of what will be learned, and
4. Control of daily schedule

The sharing means that other people become important to the child. **The child's strategies and habits for dealing with parents might not fit the new people and the new situation.**

Greg: *"Mom, I don't want to go to school any more."*

Mom: *"What? I thought you liked school."*

Greg: *"Well it's boring and the kids don't like me."*

Mom: *"Getting along in school is hard. What part do you do best?"*

Greg: *"Best? Oh, math, I guess, but what good is it anyway? And in geography, I just can't remember all that stuff."*

School is such a large part of a child's life that if it isn't going well, it clouds almost all other activities. Greg pointed out several sources of trouble when he said he was bored because he didn't see the use of math, couldn't remember the geography, and *"the kids don't like me."* Let's start with Greg's boredom.

Providing Answers to: *"Why Should I do that stuff?"*

Kids who say, *"It's boring"* could be sending a confusing message. They could mean that interest is low, and they don't see the need, or they could mean they are bored because they can't keep up or are too far ahead. Parents need to sort out

these two meanings before they react.

The poor student who finds school lessons of no use usually believes that he finds no importance for him in the tasks that are requested of him: *"Why should I do that? It's just busy work."* A parent could be misled at this point and start explaining why she, the parent, thinks the work is important.

Mom: *Math is important, Greg, because one day you'll have to manage your own money and figure out shopping and many other things in life.*

Greg: *Uh, yeah.*

Mom: *Also, you need it for the higher math that will get you into college.*

Greg: *Higher math? There's higher math? I think I won't go to college.*

Mom: *Don't talk like that. Of course, you want to go to college.*

The one-day-you'll-need-these-things approach to this problem is not on target with Greg's original objection. His point was that the work is not important for him. Greg's assessment of the you'll-need-it-for-college argument is revealed when he suggests giving up college just to avoid math problems tonight!

Mom needs an approach to the meaningfulness and importance of a good education that is within Greg's short-term view of the world. It won't help to provide more arguments about, *"You can't get anywhere without a good education,"* or, *"Jobs will be harder to get, promotions will be harder to come by and you'll end up with a hard life!"*

At the moment—in the short run—Greg doesn't want, and can't have, those things. The "getting anywhere" idea seems like a probability statement of consequences too far in the future and too abstract—anyway the people on TV seem to do all right, some of them without much education, too! How much education would a person need to earn the amount of money that the child would think is plenty?

So why should Greg study decimals in the fifth and sixth grade? What use is it to know portions of geography or American history? Why are spelling lists important? The answers need to be in the present activities of Greg's life. Remember he's a person on a short-term priority.

As he learns new things in school each day, he should be encouraged to use his new skills that day. Sometimes that requires real creativity on the part of the parent. Could Greg use his knowledge of decimals to keep track of the family checking account? Receive a fee for doing so? If we want to send a note to someone, could Greg write it? If we have to add up the grocery list, could Greg do it? Count out the money? Carry it to the store?

Will he make costly mistakes? Yes. **Couldn't he just stay interested in this stuff until he needs it? Probably not.**

One mother I work with shows how such skills are useful by taking her son to the bank with her. She allows him to go in alone and pay the bills. When he returns with the correct change and explains it all, she gives him a "tip" which might not be necessary for many boys who would be happy with the importance of task and trust they were given.

As he learns new things in school each day, he should be encouraged to use his new skills that day.

The "tip" is a parental judgment call, but **he will never ask why he has to study arithmetic—he knows why.** He also bakes for his mother. And when recipes need to be halved or doubled she does not interfere in the calculations. From bitter (and sour) experience he knows the importance of these skills. And he feels a little better about his own worth. **He's not <u>just</u> a kid, he's a kid with useful skills that his parents respect.**

The importance of many skills not covered in school are also important to learn. Cooking, washing clothes, caring for your room, and later on, car care. All tasks present the opportunities for the children to learn and gain some feeling of self-esteem as they become competent. The chores may be domestic ones that adults shun or view as burdens, but from a child's view they are, at first, new, and when the novelty has worn off, they still have the potential of letting the child be productive and helpful <u>now</u>.

Parents may be called on to show great tolerance as they

allow practice with important school-related tasks or tasks of everyday drudgery that parents could do faster. Calm your impatience with the knowledge that just mastering the task is rewarding to the child and that insures the further benefit of a little self pride. For these activities mistakes are easier to tolerate because the benefit is so obviously practical. **When the task is closer to drudgery than to adventure, more enthusiastic praise will be needed.**

Ordinarily a person gains little respect from others for drudgery. Drudgery has little in it to be proud of so when the child asks *"Why should I do this?"* it may be the beginning of an argument, but it also signals his need for appreciation for doing the job.

For activities that are not very important, fun, or adult, he's counting on you for support. His question about drudgery is a signal to focus on encouraging him and praising him for a job well done.

Learning Must Be Useful Now

It's important for parents to provide experiences that point out, here and now, the usefulness of things learned in school. Certainly a 10- or 12-year-old can handle a checking account for the family, or plan and carry out the family food shopping. This may mean allowing your child to perform the task before having the tools to do it. For example, you may assign your son or daughter the job of balancing the checking account and collecting a "service charge." When he/she sits down to do it, you may hear, *"I can't do this because I don't know decimals."* Then you can say, *"Oh, you need to add decimals! Let me go over that with you. Then you can carry on."* Your child may not enjoy the process of learning decimals, but at least now there is a concrete experience of their importance. **The greatest advantage in teaching is having a student with a reason to learn.** When the decimals job is done your child will know that reason.

For school subjects that do not easily apply to daily tasks, parents can influence their children's respect for the subject by asking questions.

Mom: *What was your work in science today?*

Greg: *We numbered the chambers of the heart and followed a drop of blood through the system.*

Mom: *I always wanted to know more about that. How does it go through?*

Show interest in school projects and point out, from news-of-the-day, where knowledge applies. Parent-child conversations that bring in schoolwork show the usefulness of the work and improve self respect.

Tactics for School Learning

Greg's second complaint about school shows up in geography. **This time it's not so much that he questions the usefulness of the subject by saying it's "boring," but he finds it "boring" because he is not doing well.** This requires a different parental approach.

Studying is a behavior. It has to be encouraged and the performance has to have some form. Sitting and staring at a book or homework sheet is not performance of a behavior and probably results in very little retention, it's boring and hard to keep going.

Greg: *I just can't keep the states straight. We're supposed to know them by next Friday!*

Dad: *What are they going to ask you about them?*

Greg: *We have to point them out on a blank map with no words or anything.*

Dad: *Do you have a map?*

Greg: *I have the one in this book and I've been studying it a lot, but I don't remember much.*

Dad: *Let's trace that one so we can have one that's blank like the one you'll see next Friday. Then we'll make a few copies when we go shopping.*

Greg: *That's OK, I'll just study this map.*

Dad: *What do you mean "study it?"*

Greg: *Well, I'll look at the states and try to remember which ones go where.*

Dad: *Greg, I think you need to go through a few drills in a situation like the one you're going to have next Friday.*

Greg: *OK, I'll do the tracing.*

To get the homework behavior going, we first ask about what our student is doing. **Most students who are falling behind don't have a specific target for their effort.** When they study, they stare at things—notes or books—they don't DO anything. **Most of us don't have the kind of memory that retains a great deal from just looking; it's the doing that will be remembered.**

If reading is the assignment, have your student take reading notes—preferably on cards. For each page of reading the student should take some note. *"Never turn a page without writing something,"* should be the rule.

The reading note requirement has several advantages. The first is that it becomes a source of motivation because it is a concrete product from which the student can take a feeling of accomplishment. Second, it is a product that the parent can encourage, review, and use as a basis of other rewards, if that's in the plan.

Most of us don't have the kind of memory that retains a great deal from just looking; it's the doing that will be remembered.

The third and most important advantage is that notes provide bench-marks of progress that allow the student to pick up at the right place after an interruption. **It's surprising how much studying is done in small sessions of only a few minutes between interruptions by phone calls, snacks, and other chores.** Without a note-taking habit, most of us start again at the same place we started before. With past notes, we have a record of where we are and we can move on to new material.

A last advantage of active studying comes at review time. A condensation of the work is available as notes, maps, tables, and drill sheets. That will guarantee the right

material will be memorized and you and your student can avoid the misery of thrashing madly through unorganized material unnecessarily.

How About a Computer Program to Help Learning?

Computer programs at school or at home can be very helpful, especially if the drills are similar to the other schoolwork. Math and language programs often have useful drills because the content from school to school is almost exactly the same. But to expand to other, not so drillable, subjects you'll need advice from school about what history, government, literature, or social studies topics to cover.

Noted psychologist B. F. Skinner said computer programs (he called them teaching machines in the 1960's) would be the major activity of the schoolroom by the 1980's. They have become a part of many classrooms and libraries, but their application is far short of Skinner's prediction. What happened?

For most children, the novelty of working the screen wears off and adult encouragements and real life applications are needed to keep interest up.

Skinner felt that success with questions and answers would be enough incentive to keep the student working. But for most children, the novelty of working the screen wears off and adult encouragements and real life applications are needed to keep interest up. It's the same support from parents and teachers that homework and lessons have always required. **Leaving a student on a chair, even one in front of a computer, will not produce much learning by itself.** So plan to continue regular contributions to the computer learning in the form of home projects and specific encouragements.

A second limitation of computer effectiveness is in the action the student is asked for. Remember, learning is in the doing. If a student learns to press the right buttons on a keyboard to answer math questions, his performance will be best there and less perfect with paper and pencil and in verbal drills.

It's amazing to us adults that learning 3 plus 5 on a

computer doesn't result in a correct answer on every test paper after that. The student can make improvements with a computer program but **how the improvement shows up on tests depends on how similar the test is to the program, not only in content, but in the way the student is asked to provide answers.**

Here's another place you can contribute: make up some tests. Quizzes and drills with pencil and paper will give your child practice in expressing the answers as required later when no keyboard is around.

School Behaviors

Sometimes people argue that the performance by good students proves that problem students can shape up also. But we know habits change only for important reasons such as new encouragements for reasonable goals. Threats, reprimands, and coercions are temporary ways to shape up students. But if we could get the poor student consistently going right, he/she would have a good chance of encountering good results and then continuing. We need a way to get that first turn-around to work.

Paul: *"I like war books."*

Media Specialist: *"I know you do, but what about those homework papers you need to do?"*

Paul: *"Oh, I'll never catch up, so why keep trying?"*

Media Specialist: *"Well, I'll give you a reason, Paul. For every finished homework paper you show me, I'll find one of those books you're interested in, or I'll have a piece of candy for you. Choose an easy paper first so that you will have some success right away."*

This strategy helped Paul catch up in one of his classes, but should candy be used as a reward in school? Shouldn't Paul get the practice of looking up his own books in the media center?

Although these are important points, I think in this case the need requires concrete rewards to get important behavior going again. The use of an easy paper as a starting point was also a good suggestion.

An Additional Schoolroom Strategy

The next few suggestions are taken from my book ***Teenagers and Parents*** but, as you will see, they help younger children just as much. Counselors coach students to improve their classroom habits with these steps. Use incentives to encourage your child to try them also, particularly in classes where your student is "having trouble with the teacher."

1. **A student influences a teacher's attitude just as a teacher influences a student:** When there is a choice, your student could sit in a seat as close to front as possible and keep good eye contact with the teacher during presentations—just as you would practice good listening skills back in Chapter 10 in a private situation.

2. Your student should be alert for a question to ask concerning the material. A continual banter of unnecessary questions won't help, but thoughtful questions help learning and teaching. **Einstein's mother used to ask him when he came home from school, *"Did you ask any good questions today?"*** If students ask good questions in class, they have reasons to follow the teachers' presentations more closely and are more likely to learn.

3. The student should occasionally talk to the teacher about the subject. On at least a weekly basis, speak to the teacher about the class with a question or comparison to some aspect of your other subjects or experiences.

Some people may object to the contrived nature of these suggestions, but **many children have the mistaken notion that the classroom is, or should be, a place where completely passive learning takes place.** The student will benefit from an active, assertive role occasionally. The fact is that a classroom is a social situation where exchanges are a part of the learning and the exchanges influence the teacher's grading. When a student improves his relationship with his teacher, that will improve his active learning—and that will improve grades!

An Additional Strategy to Try at Home

A Harvard professor I know always distributes a slip of paper to each student before class. The top line on the slip reads, *"The Main Point of the day was . . ."* followed by a space for the student to complete the statement. The next line says, *"My question for today is . . ."* followed by more writing room. The professor collects the slips each day to see how the main point has been understood and what confusion is in need of more attention during the next class. Students must think, summarize, and question, and the professor has excellent feedback. Many professors now use this procedure. Even before your child goes to Harvard, the question-and-answer game can help school work.

Try this exercise in question-asking practice before your son or daughter goes to Harvard!

Explain that you are going to play a question and information game related to the media and school.

a. Pick a news show, program, or written article heard or seen lately, and make up a question about the information. For example, *"This morning I read an article about the eclipse tonight. What I want to know is, why does an eclipse happen sometimes and not at other times?"*

b. Now, it's the child's turn to ask a question about school subject material. Choose classes in which learning needs to be improved. For example, point to a place on the map where four states come

together at a single place. Answering each question is not necessary, but if this happens, it's a plus to the goal of the game, which is to focus on the usefulness of each subject. Repeat the game occasionally until all school subjects and media items are covered.

c. A follow-up to the game is for the child to ask questions in classes at school. Compliment your child for questions and encourage discussion about the information. If your child didn't ask a question, have him/her write the ones that would have been best to ask.

An Additional Strategy for Homework Time

Remember the activity suggested in Chapter 3 where you read two magazine articles in different ways? Here's a version of that activity which can help children find their most effective study method.

a. Both parent and child each read silently two different pages from two school texts, trying to remember as much as possible. Then they take a break to listen to 15 minutes of favorite music together while having a snack. After the break, each takes a turn telling everything remembered from the assigned page. The listener needs to take brief notes.

b. Then both parent and child read another page of school material out loud, trying to remember everything they can. Take a break to do a chore together for about 15 minutes. Then tell each other and take notes about what you each recall.

c. Each read a page and take notes on what you read. Break for a game of cards. Share what you each remember (without your notes). Each listener takes notes on the material you tell.

Compare the amount of notes from each session. Which study method produced the most recall? Discuss the reasons for your results.

The more activity (reading aloud and taking notes) your student does with the study material, the more learning there will be. Evaluate these study methods and encourage your child to use the ones that work the best for him or her.

The most important advice on learning comes from early history when Sophocles said, *"The learning is in the doing of the thing."* If you wanted to improve your tennis, you would probably arrange time to practice on the courts. If you wanted to learn some new guitar strums, it would take practice. When it comes to school work, it's easy for the student to forget how much practice counts.

GUIDELINE 1: Always use homework time in an active way!

Action Example 1: Always have pencil and paper handy when reading. Note-taking is good practice, and good practice is good learning. Take reading notes on every page of reading. For most students, staring at pages is just an excuse to put off real learning.

Authors and publishers of school books are always struggling to keep the size and expense of books down; every page has something to say. What is it? Write it down. It's a good idea to put many of these notes in question form. The student should use the headings in the book to make up the questions and use note cards if they are convenient. Note cards encourage review of specifics. **As test-time approaches students with the note-taking habit will already have their own review to study!**

Action Example 2: Students should make new lists, drawings and summaries of class materials. **Any new "doing" will help the student remember.** Working with other students can produce the same kind of practice and drill. Original lists, drawings and charts are more easily remembered by those who create them. **I have never had a student fail**

a course when these creations and study notes were handy!

Action Example 3: Make up the test. If your students are still concerned about a test, they should construct their own version of the test trying to make one as similar to the one expected as they can. Students often report that more than half of their questions were the same as the ones on the teacher's test! With those questions answered in advance, the students easily remembered their answers and were quickly half way to a good test grade.

Action Example 4: Keep a calendar! The calendar should include plans for homework for each day and a record of successes. It should include priorities for the assignments to study so that the most important work of the moment is completed first.

GUIDELINE 2: Reinforce Practice.

Many competing activities have built-in payoffs, but the benefits of studying are often a long way off. If student Rick studies, benefits are good but slow in showing up. He becomes more efficient as good study skills develop—the longer you practice a behavior, the more reliable and useful it becomes. This includes the habit of practice in studying, taking study notes, re-doing materials, and keeping a calendar. Future opportunities, grades and preparation for new subjects will have long-range benefits, but are weak motivators for present effort.

So what can a teacher or parent do to reinforce a student who has not acquired the attitudes or skills to study effectively? While the calendar helps in planning the time to study, parents need to help in planning a place to study.

1. Provide a place where active note-taking is convenient. This is just as important to the learning place as freedom from distraction.
2. Parents should talk about subjects their children are taking and create examples of the usefulness of the material being studied.

3) Parents should reinforce knowledge about the subjects by asking questions—even questions that stump the parents as well as the student and make it necessary to look up the answer in the homework materials.
4) Parents should reinforce and praise daily and weekly grades that reflect knowledge learned.

GUIDELINE 3: Use a Strategy for Tests.

Even after students have acquired good study habits through the guidelines of their own practice and encouragement from parents and teachers, they often complain of having trouble with tests. Here are test strategies that bring results in either essay or objective tests.

During objective tests certainly every student intends to answer each question, but very often items go unanswered. There are two reasons for this: fear of guessing and failure to remember the question! The student should carefully read and eliminate options. Checking off poor choices allows the student to focus on the remaining options and improve chances that small differences will be discovered.

Once an answer has been selected, the student should read the first part of the item one more time to be sure that the selection is actually an answer to this particular question. Very often wrong options are, in themselves, correct, but not the answer to the question.

For essay tests, the guideline is to answer each question twice—once in outline form and then as an essay answer. The student should write a brief outline on another sheet before beginning essay answers. This first answer can be in the student's own words and shorthand.

For example, in response to the question, *"What was important about the Gettysburg Address?"* the student might jot down, *"Lincoln, at graveyard, during Civil War, trying to unite the country; said country must*

try hard to finish the war, for equality and people to run government, give quote."

Now, looking at the first answer, the students are likely to make the second answer complete and in good form. Also, as the student is writing the final answer, new points may come to mind to add to the final answer at the right places according to the outline. The teacher is more likely to give a high score when the major points are easy to find.

Learning is a Required Activity of Life

Students often believe that if only they could get through school, the demands of learning would be over. Adults know that new learning tasks are always coming up both on the job and at home.

The guidelines presented here and other strategies for learning are the important tools to acquire in childhood. Many of the specifics of school lessons will be forgotten, but the means for finding and learning them again will prepare your child for most challenges. Students with good learning habits will always have an easier and more enjoyable experience with each new opportunity in both their work and home life.

Exercise and Summary for Part 4

Try Out Your Skills:

Practice listening with this approach (to keep their channel open)

1. Avoid criticism.
2. Keep the conversation on a third person or other event, not a discussion of her/him or you.
3. Use questions frequently to show interest.
4. Respond with reflective and sympathetic comments often, instead of evaluations. Evaluations need to wait for invitations because they emphasize your authority (rightness) and your child's ignorance (wrongness).

Practice Communication (opening up a two-way channel)

With another parent or a friend practice the rules of conversation while you share a simple story such as a shopping trip, mild difficulty getting the kids to school, or helping them with homework. Begin with one person as the listener and one as the teller.

1. **Keep eye contact.** Look at your conversation partner most of the time. A child expects a good listener to look at him/her. We don't like to feel unattended because the person we're trying to talk to is staring at the newspaper or TV while we ask a question. Children feel that way too.

2. **Use good posture.** Face your son or daughter while talking and listening. Use body language that says, *"I'm alert! I'm interested!"* A parent who slumps, looks away, or even walks away sends messages that discourage and insult the talker.

3. **Avoid criticism and ask questions.** Use questions that continue the conversation by asking for longer

answers than just *"yes"* or *"no."* *"How did it feel?"* is more likely to continue the talk than *"What time was it?"* Emphasize IT questions instead of using YOU. *"How was it at school today?"* not *"How did you do at school?"* Careful questions can help in a neutral, non-opinionated way, so the speaker discovers a better understanding of what happened and why.

4. **Avoid solution statements and use reflective statements.** Re-word the last thing your partner said to show you understand what he/she told you. *"Boy, I really hate that Mr. Jones for math!"* could be answered with, *"He really annoys you."* or *"You get mad in there a lot, I guess."*

   Replace the temptation to give advice or criticize by reflecting your partner's statements instead. Suggestions such as *"Why don't you . . . ?"* or *"Have you tried . . . ?"* make the one with the problem feel inferior, resentful, and argumentative. You will get the whole story by reflecting, and your listening helps because the speaker will clarify the situation and her/her feelings by telling about it.

5. **Share your experience.** Share stories, jokes, and experiences that helped you learn about getting along in life. Be selective, avoid stories that are too close to a sore point with your child. If your son or daughter feels your experiences are not directed as advice to his\her specific weaknesses, the tales can be enjoyed and they will improve the relationship.

Planning Homework Practice

Before concluding this exercise, review the guidelines for learning on the preceding three pages. They were:

GUIDELINE 1. Use Study Time in an Active Way
GUIDELINE 2. Reinforce Practice.
GUIDELINE 3. Use a strategy for tests.

Part 5

Bringing the Principles and the Parents Together

The purpose of every day of childhood is to grow up a little bit. *The child longs for the joy of it and parents take pride in it. Consistent strategies, planned with the help of the views of fellow parents, are the key to the combination of a happy parenthood for you and a happy childhood for your children. Whether you are a single parent or one end of a partnership, child-rearing will be more understandable and more enjoyable with the benefit of other parents' experiences.*

Chapter 14

Bringing the Principles Together

It is marvelous the way a baby fingers, feels, and experiences those first encounters with objects and textures, then begins to focus and give some objects more attention and others less. We approach the career of caring for a baby person with an admiration for its fresh view of our old world. ***We take our responsibility with the hope of extending human existence not only further but higher.*** *Now the details of strategies need to make sense in an overall philosophy for child-rearing. We will teach the children what to do and who they are.*

What guidelines could measure up to this task of preparing another person's future? Only ones that lead to courageous learning and expression without fear of unjustified criticism, ones that will keep us alert to opportunities for giving our children the self-confidence and self-esteem to reach out for new answers to questions we could not completely resolve.

Inherited characteristics, such as basic personality, will still be apparent throughout childhood experiences. However, a review of daily events can often be more useful because a parent can fill needs, withhold reactions, or deliberately provide consequences.

The suggestions of the previous chapters can help you discover your child's motivations and satisfy those wants with strategies that work toward growth and proper behavior—rewarded behavior.

The best outcome would be that we all get what we deserve, improve our behavior as a result, and are satisfied. In the real world, of course, some justice is done, but undeserved rewards do occur and satisfaction occurs only to a degree. Through all of this, this book assumes that parents can make things come out better for themselves and for their children.

The question is whether parents will have time and love enough to plan consequences so the child will learn what needs to be learned and grow up properly.

The crucial question confronting parents is not whether rewards, punishments, encouragements, and discouragements should be used to influence the child's behavior; in day-to-day living that influence is inevitable. The question is whether parents will have time and love enough to plan some of these consequences so that the child will learn what needs to be learned and grow up properly.

Remember the Basics of the Practical Approach

Start Early. The most dangerous thing on earth is a human being with nothing to do. A child may not have the potential to destroy that an adult has, but a child delayed from moving on to new challenges has a surprising ability to find trouble. That is one reason this book encourages you to start expecting (encouraging and rewarding) your child to make his/her bed, make a meal, wash the car, look after his/her younger sibling, as soon as that is reasonable. Start soon for the sake of his/her self-esteem and for the sake of building abilities he and she can be proud of.

Parents often hesitate to hand over the daily tasks of life for many reasons. They may feel a responsibility to do the caring themselves, and feel guilty if they insist that the child take part. Parents are often inclined to protect their children from drudgery as if it were an evil to be concealed as long as possible.

Include Worthwhile Chores. **Completing the drudgeries of life is, in fact, one source of satisfaction that wards off depression.** With children this benefit is often missed because the verbiage that goes with chores is usually negative. Both parent and child talk of "chores" as burdens to be carried. That's true, but the usefulness to psychological health should not be forgotten by the parent facing resistance from a growing-up child.

Boys, in particular, are subject to protection from chores and often suffer feelings of exasperation at nothing "really worthwhile" to do. **Remember a child probably wouldn't know what's "really worthwhile" if it bumped him in the leg!**

Parents need to teach these values like all others, by example, and by seeing to it that the son gets opportunity and encouragement for his domestic efforts. **For a boy, there is a possibility of unrecognized sexism in being denied training for everyday.** He may not know he is being short-changed. He may complain all the way through any chore requested of him. But the effect on his self-respect, his value of himself, will be improved with every competence he acquires. And **when he encounters a temptation to try some self-degrading, or self-damaging behavior, he will be a little more likely to value himself and believe he has more to risk and more to lose.** When an adult refuses, let's say, a drink at lunch, what is the most common excuse? *"Sorry, I can't, I've got to work this afternoon, things to do."* (The self-evaluation is: I have important things to accomplish (skills to use), I am too valuable!)

Completing the drudgeries of life is, in fact, one source of satisfaction that wards off depression.

Build from Small Requests to Big Challenges. Perhaps your strategy cannot always guarantee good behavior. But you can plan situations that put the odds in your favor and ensure that there will be more opportunities for good behavior and learning.

For example, mothers know that their children get cranky or tired at certain times. So for strategies that deal with aggressive behaviors, a child has a better chance at some times than others.

While it's true the child will eventually have to learn to control himself in all situations, let's start the training at a time of day when success and opportunity for support are likely. A child who is cranky before dinner and is just learning to control his temper with others, shouldn't have friends over in the late afternoon when probabilities for mistakes are high. Another plan might be to have dinner earlier, or lunch later, in order to give him a better chance. **These alternatives are not strategies about reactions and consequences but merely rearrangements of the family schedule or environment to maximize success and minimize errors.**

What changes in the situation can reduce poor eating habits without the nagging?

For example, parents and teachers know homework can be improved with proper surroundings, and PTA's encourage parents to provide a quiet and private place conducive to doing homework.

These kinds of arrangements are important for many situations beyond just homework. Accidents at meal time can easily be influenced by the way the situation is first set up. **If a child is given a glass of milk too full, a glass of juice too hard to handle, three utensils when he only uses one, five foods to play with when he never eats three, and is then seated on two slippery telephone books, the family is set up for an unhappy dinner of trouble right from the start.** The goal may be to get him to eat properly with these disadvantages, but the training will have to start with a better chance of success.

Let's take up another example. A child who never eats vegetables can present a problem in setting up the situation for learning. Her parents might tell her that she can't have dessert unless she eats the "proper" foods first—not a bad approach, except **when parents come anywhere near punishment they usually begin talking a lot.** They threaten, nag, and insult in an effort to not have to withhold the dessert. They could carry through and deny the ice cream without any more warnings but, as we know, parents are too loving, as well they should be, and too afraid that the child may have forgotten the rule or been otherwise unfairly treated so they provide reminders which quickly develop into nagging about food.

What changes in the situation can reduce poor eating habits without the nagging? If eating only desserts is a serious prob-

lem, dessert could be eliminated from the house for awhile. A less dramatic procedure would be for the parents to have dessert later, after the child is in bed.

If all of this seems too extreme, it may be time to rethink just how serious the problem is. These reactions may seem too extreme because it's "just not that important" when the parents give the problem serious thought. Maybe changing this habit is not worth giving up all dinnertime pleasantness and everybody should eat what they want of what is served. Children, adults and creatures of the earth will pick a fairly good diet on their own if it is available and sugar is subtracted from the temptations.

Have Your Support "At the Ready"

When can you expect a child to learn without these extra incentives? And until then, how do you find the right consequence?

The answers lie in another version of the question: "What would be the result if he or she would get the task right?" This should be a frequent parental question—whether the problem has come up because of a bad behavior or the absence of a good one. What behaviors are we looking for? What will we do when we get them? A parent with answers to these questions will know how to react and what to do when the good performance pops out.

This leads to simple situations where the child is "set up" to be successful! And "success" will be the first small steps toward the goal. **Without this soul-searching for a ready incentive when the child is slightly successful, the little success may not be recognized and only instant and complete triumph by the child (not likely) will produce a positive reaction.**

Without help for the little steps along the way, triumph may be so long in coming that parents will be unenthusiastic in support, *"Well, it's about time you got that room cleaned up!"* So we need an early stage incentive not only to encourage the child but to encourage ourselves to continue genuine and enthusiastic support.

As an example of putting environmental engineering and

shaping together, let's look at the old "coming when called" problem. Mom works on a good dinner, calls everyone when it's ready, and gets a *"Just a second, Mom,"* from those glued to the TV.

Three questions can help you think about how to make this situation better:

1. How can the situation be improved, that is, set up so that the proper and considerate behavior is more likely?
2. What will your reaction be when they do it?
3. What should be the reaction when they don't?

The set-up might include delaying dinner so everyone is hungry, timing the call for dinner with the break between TV shows, and having favorites when the schedule is tight, and you want people to come on time. Your reaction when they get it right might be a simple compliment, *"Oh good, Tom, you came right away. It makes me feel good because I worked hard to have a good meal ready."*

The plan might include talking about a few topics very relevant to the children. Your reaction to procrastination might include starting without the children, or prohibiting TV from 6 pm to 8 pm so you won't have the competition, or leaving off dessert when dinner starts late.

With these reactions sorted out, you have a plan to produce some improvements—maybe not complete harmony in the household, but at least a good chance for some pleasant evenings.

Coming home on time in the afternoon is a similar problem. Punishing consequences could be brought to bear, removing his/her dinner from the table, letting it get cold, limiting him to the house from after school until dinner. These consequences would have some effect, but beyond punishments, we could set up the situation for success, and emphasize positive reasons for coming home on time.

Punishment only answers the question, *"What if he does it wrong again?"* But we need the answers to the question, *"What if he does it right?"* What happens next—right after he comes home (gets it right).

What is it about the situation and consequences that makes you believe that he should even try getting there on time?

For most children, the reaction to their coming home is predictable. At dinner questions come up about how the day went. Many older children have learned to answer these questions with a safe "OK" or just a shrug.

Remember your own growing-up days when you would duck and weave as the more "dangerous topics" were about to surface. Kids learn which side their parents will be on if they tell about particular school problems, and they know their parents will take a side! If they have had trouble at school, they know sympathy is unlikely. **In some families the chances of verbal punishment, ridicule, and criticism is high, so it seems best to wait and talk to friends about the touchy problems.**

The lack of thoughtful planning by parents leads to erratic reactions and makes cynics out of children.

Keep Your Support Consistent with Growing Expectations

Parents do support their children but most of us seldom ask what, specifically, we want to encourage. So the encouragement is inconsistent and more related to the mood of the parents than the actions of the child. In some cases, playing it safe is better than trying to predict parental moods.

When moody and inconsistent parents do praise or reward their kids, the kids don't react with the proper appreciation and the parents are disappointed. The child may be cynical because he knows the praise is a temporary product of his parents' moods than it is an appreciation of his success. **The lack of thoughtful planning by parents leads to erratic reactions and makes cynics out of children.**

If a plan for positive reactions produces some accumulation of success over a few weeks, then the next encouragements for the next success become easier to give, a respect and positive expectation for what the child will do develops, and we are off in a good direction.

Without these timely positive reactions, parents are likely to become more and more impatient. Their level of expectation (what they are willing to reward) goes up, even

while their experience tells them that there is no improvement!

The level of expectation should be determined by what the parents know the child will (not could) do. But the frustration of no progress often leads parents to greater demands instead of smaller ones. This makes failure and parental disappointment even more likely next time.

The planning must take into account how the consequences are going to be controlled.

What does all this make of dinner time? Something a child will look forward to if the encouragement and listening rules are followed? Or something a child would just as soon be late for if criticism is likely.

Do you look forward to a dinner with Uncle George? Yes, if he's agreeable, supportive, and engaging. No, if he's critical, punitive, and disapproving. **With Uncle George, you make your invitations accordingly. With your child, you'll have to build the situation rather than avoid it.** Someone will have to be adult enough to set standards the child can, and is likely, to meet. Encourage the successes with that and build a pleasant situation. With Uncle George, you can expect him to take some responsibility for the dinner time atmosphere. With young ones someone else must create it. **Later, with the skills they learn from you, they can take some social responsibility themselves.**

Review Your Good Consequences

No one would want to plan and control all his or her reactions to his child, but some planning and control will provide a direction and some gratifying progress. The planning must take into account how the consequences are going to be controlled. For example, TV time could be a positive incentive for getting the homework done. Taking away TV time could be used as a punishment, but the effectiveness of TV time as a motivator could depend on the programs available at the moment.

This complication could be avoided with a tally sheet that keeps track of TV time earned or lost. Then your son or daughter could cash in time from the tally sheet when desired. While the tally sheet procedure solves the problem when the

good programs are on, it is less convenient since the tally sheet has to be updated and attended and lacks immediate effects. Subtracting time for bad behavior might not matter at the moment because there may be no desirable program right now and other time may still be left on the sheet anyway. Nevertheless, a tally sheet has many advantages in controlling the use of timed privileges. It can be used to control weekly allowance, outdoor play, or any other measurable privilege that might be controlled as an incentive for the child's good behavior.

When privileges are to be controlled, it's important to make the rules with minimums and maximum you know you can keep. Rules with extremes that "really fix" his problem or "make him stand up and take notice" will probably be rules that are inconsistent. Set your standards so that, with easy conscience, you can apply the consequences. You might wish to set a minimum and a maximum amount of TV time each day so that your child's bad or good behavior can't make an extreme situation that results in a change of rules.

Change the Situation Slowly

In the process of making incentives, encouragements and rewards more likely, it is usually necessary to settle for behavior that is less than ideal. Of course every parent knows that starting at the ideal is not possible but many believe that strong encouragement should be withheld until good progress is made. To guarantee support of the very first efforts a person makes on a new task, we need a short-term target. Later we can add the higher expectations by expanding the request or expanding the range of circumstances that call for the behavior. Expanding the request, asking for even better behaviors, is called shaping.

Expanding the range of circumstances where the same behavior will be expected is called fading. **The distinction is important because no new levels of success are needed for fading, whereas a new and better behavior will be demanded in shaping.** The following example will point out this important difference.

Carol would not talk in school. Her mother had come to see me because this only-a-little-troublesome habit had become

a real problem with the requirement that in order to be promoted from first grade, the student had to demonstrate reading aloud in class. Fortunately for Carol, her mom, and me, shaping reading behavior was not a part of the problem. Reading aloud was already easy for Carol to do under another circumstance, at home with her mother. Carol needed to fade in her success to the school situation.

Situations similar to Carol's home situation for reading were arranged in a way that were increasingly similar to her schoolroom experience. First Mom met Carol after school. With the classroom empty, Carol would sit in her seat and read to her mother for a few minutes. The following week the teacher stayed in the classroom but was obviously occupied with her desk work in front of the room. She took no notice of Carol or the reading. In the third week, the teacher took more notice of the mother-daughter reading session, and by the fourth week she did nothing but listen to Carol read. **For a few more sessions Mom sat farther away and the teacher sat a little nearer. The last session took place before the other children had left the room, and Carol's promotion to second grade was assured.**

Plan Your Shaping Steps

The fading procedure just described did not require new behaviors or complicated strategies. If the child had yet to learn to read, we would have had a much bigger problem with new definitions of steps along the way. We might start with identifying pictures or letters, providing some phonics training, adding simple words to the lessons, and so on.

Whenever you use a shaping process, you must begin with a level of behavior that occurs frequently so that the child can learn the rules and experience some success right away.

Even after some progress, backtracking nay be necessary to keep positive reactions high during the slumps in performance.

In nearly every case the ideal behavior is not gained in one easy step. At first you will have to dig back to some low level of success. After that not-very-exciting level has been strengthened, the next level can be added with plenty of encouragement.

The Shaping of Rachel and Jeff

Rachel came home with failure after failure on her spelling lists. Her mom's temptation was to drill her over the errors but, although getting rid of error was the ultimate goal, this wouldn't do much to pump up Rachel. The approach of *"Let's all help Rachel with her mistakes"* ensures that rewards will be hard to come by and the demands will be frustrating and embarrassing with frequent mistakes; it will emphasize how much Mom knows and how little Rachel knows.

So I asked Rachel's mom to start spelling sessions with the few words Rachel had right from the lists of the past weeks. Mom ran through those lists, noting with pride and encouragement all Rachel's successes which were many. Then Rachel's mom mixed in a few of the words that Rachel had missed. Bolstered by some recent successes, Rachel could tolerate her own errors and her mom's corrections. Mom would often come right back to one or two easier words. **Mom manipulated Rachel's success rate and kept it high by putting in as many "easy" words as necessary.** A few 15-minute drills and Rachel was finished with the week's spelling list and feeling good about herself and about Mom.

Jeffrey is another example of starting where encouragement is probable. Jeff's mother complained to me that he couldn't sit still in school, keep his attention on his work, or stay out of trouble with other students. **The prospect of long-term consequences (grades, threats of failing, being held back) had no effect on him.**

By using the technique of focusing (Chapter 3) and putting behavioral definitions in place, it might seem we could start with some aspect of Jeff's problem. For instance we might ttry to use an incentive to build up the time Jeff sits in his seat, then we could work on his attention span and then his tendency to fight with other students.

All this would be a long process. But these behaviors are interrelated with the thread of Jeffery's boredom so we may have to deal with them all at once. **Our strategy with Jeff's teacher and parents was to concentrate on all three complaints at the same time but only for a short period.**

Each morning Jeff's teacher "checked in" with Jeff as he arrived in class so that he had a little attention "in the bank" to start with. Then if Jeff stayed in his seat, paid attention, and didn't get into any trouble with others for the first 15 minutes of class, he would get a reward for his success—a copy of a note printed up for his teacher to use. It said, *"Dear Mr. & Mrs. Jones, Jeffrey was just fine in school this morning."* More about the notes later.

The strategy for Jeff required him to take control of all three behaviors at once—quite a challenge which seems to violate our notion of asking for very small steps to guarantee a reward at the very beginning. But in Jeff's case we are quite demanding right from the start, but only for a very short time, which makes it possible to deliver on the reward very quickly. **Nothing Jeff does during the rest of the day can take away the precious note which is about how he started off his day.**

Now because it was difficult for Jeffrey's parents to deliver a reward in the classroom where the success might happen, we used a part of the idea of a "token economy." You are familiar with this idea in your own life. You work for tokens, something that is only a symbol of the value it can be exchanged for. In the real world, it's money.

Jeff knows about money, too, but Jeff has an extra token—the note from the teacher. Jeff was told, *"If you stay in your seat, pay attention, and stay out of trouble for the first fifteen minutes of class, Mrs. Norton will give you a note, and you can use that note for extra playtime, TV time, or extra dessert at home after school."*

Jeff found more than one use for his notes and wanted more. A second note from Mrs. Norton was supplied for the second 15 minutes, the interval was changed to 20 minutes and two more intervals were added for the first 40 minutes after lunch. **Now Jeff could get a maximum of four notes—tickets for admission to extra activities at home—each day.**

We didn't want to complicate Mrs. Norton's procedures in the class so Jeff's parents made up the notes and delivered them to Mrs. Norton. And we didn't want to give extra attention to Jeff for being bad any more than necessary to get our strategy into place. Therefore, Mrs. Norton refrained from discussing Jeff's mistakes in class. He either got the note or he didn't—no

arguments, no repeated explanations, and no threats.

We all know that a system like this can't be kept going for a long time. Jeff will get tired of it, his parents may get tired of thinking up new privileges, and Mrs. Norton certainly has enough to do without continuing this rule for a long time. The usual results of good school behavior are going to have to take over and keep Jeff on the right track once we get him started. **These natural results—admiration, encouragement, respect at home, and usefulness of his learning at home—need to be pushed as part of our strategy because we know the contrived reward can't go on forever.**

There are three important points of caution here. First, Mrs. Norton must be consistent and keep in mind a good definition of what 15 minutes of good behavior is. Second, Mom and Dad have to play the game strictly with Jeff. And third, Jeff must understand from the beginning that the rules will change along the way.

Jeff's case required a lot of effort from several people. They carried through and Jeff has become a much better student as a result. The planning, the conferences, the notes, the work at home seeing that the notes were worth something—all take time and effort. So as you think about your own children, you have to ask yourself an important question: *"Is this a problem that deserves my effort?"* Many times as you think this question through, you may want to change the complaint or scratch the problem off your list altogether.

Move Along, The Children are Growing

Once some new level has been reached, the problem is how fast to move along. **Feedback and support can grow stale rapidly if you don't move on to some new and challenging target.** Also, dwelling too long at one stage can make it difficult to move on later. Consider the parent who praises baby talk long after it has been mastered. It was a necessary first level in shaping, and rewarding it was a step forward. But the longer the child continues baby talk, the more likely he is to discover that some people will always find it cute and attractive. Also his parents become very practiced at understanding it and inadvertently reward the almost unintelligible requests. These

complications have their counterparts in eating, dressing, and "baby" social skills—selfishness, possessiveness, and lack of consideration for others.

Instead of a policy that says, *"You can never move too slowly,"* it is usually better to take a more flexible view of child-rearing and say, "**When in doubt, move up to a new level of expectation for a while, it is always all right to move back again, if necessary.**"

One of the most common reasons for hesitating to move up is that the next step involves some real consequences for the parent. After a child has learned to count money and make change, he is ready to do some shopping—probably with your money! This is a very dangerous time for hesitation on your part because this is when the child learns whether or not the skills are really useful and part of growing up, or just boring preparation for growing up later. We can't expect a child to be eager about your instruction, or the school's instruction, if he's only told *"Someday you'll need to know these things."* Provide situations where he "needs to know these things" now.

In the later steps of shaping, a parent's role changes. The parent has shaped the child and gradually prepared him for the outside world and now that world provides more and more of the consequences.

But there is still an important parental duty. Now your job begins to resemble a coach's job. You're not in the game any more providing consequences; you are more often on the sidelines giving advice, pointing out what happened and why and where the consequences are coming from.

The crucial point to remember is that this change of duty doesn't happen at a particular age, but just for particular skills. You may finish giving planned lessons for toilet training by four, and hopefully you'll be finished with eating behavior by eight! Really?! And you still may be working on money management at 17 and social skills at 25!

Chapter 15

Bringing the Parents Together

Single parents have many disadvantages in rearing children solo. Yet they do have the advantage of a more consistent set of rules and reactions. Both parents with and parents without partners encounter new problems as child rearing becomes adult rearing. Expanding moments of separation become more apparent and the paradox of keeping control while also giving it away creates tough moments for all parents.

Parental Companionship

Most encounters in parenting are first-time experiences. Even parents with many children are usually surprised at what the next one does. **Parents need companion parents to create a situation that is both their sounding board and their think tank.** And we need the assurance that others have similar problems to ours.

Whether you are on your own, or in partnership, a Parent Support Group can be a great help. Start a small parents group

today. Even a reluctant spouse will develop some new ideas and attitudes from a discussion group. A few calls will produce other parents who are willing to be a part. Agreement on parental strategies is not a requirement. The opportunity to sort through common problems is the important part and you will probably discover everyone is both partly right.

Parents can provide a model to their children about how the members of the family should treat each other.

For opening topics at meetings you could start with one chapter or exercise from this book. Other topics suggested by individuals could be a part of each meeting so that each meeting covers immediate concerns.

Parents Protecting Each Other!

Spouses and members of a parent group can support and encourage each other when confidence weakens. And a spouse or relative right on the scene can come to the aid of each other when it seems their partner is being abused. **They should not stand by when their best friend is being mistreated, even if it's the children doing the mistreating.** Parents can provide a model to their children about how the members of the family should treat each other. ***"Say, be careful how you speak to your mother!"*** **can be a source of comfort to a mom and a help to a child testing limits and blundering into accumulating guilt.**

Show no tolerance of abuse of your partner—by anybody. When Mom shows respect for Dad's opinion, it improves the value of Dad's opinion in the next discussion with his son or daughter, and when Dad shows confidence in Mom's competence in everything from driving to financial decisions, her ability to relate to the children on equal terms is increased. ***"Jane, what do you think about those prices?"*** **sends a message not only to Mom that her thoughts are of value, but also to any little ears in hearing range.**

The point at the beginning of Chapter 5 that most people will not treat your children better than you do has a parallel idea here: **Your children won't treat your spouse any better than you do.** Your model will be imitated. The attitudes of your children toward other people will be taught by example.

And your consideration of your spouse will be taught by example also.

That's a good reason to sort out conflicts in private—away from the children. As with their own conversations, children listening to other people's conversations are more interested in what the conversations say about how the people feel about each other than in the content of the argument. You may think the argument about fixing the car is about car repairs and who should see that it gets done. Your spouse may think the subject is car repair also. But a child listening on the side doesn't understand—doesn't care to understand—the details of dropping a car off for repairs. **The child is attending only the message about the opinion each person has of the other.**

So after a simple disagreement on the car, many parents are surprised to have their child ask:

> *"Daddy, you don't like Mommy do you?"*
> *"What! Of course I do. Where would you get an idea like that?"*

The misunderstanding children get from focusing on what seems to be the feelings Mom and Dad have for each other can be corrected. **But the temptation to imitate what they have heard will linger on.** The impression a child receives from the respect and consideration parents show for each other, or the lack of it, will only be corrected by setting different examples in the future. You can encourage your children to be loving by treating them in a loving way, but you will also have to show them, by example, when you deal with your spouse and other members of the family.

Friends Protecting Parents

Friends of struggling parents, particularly single parents, should keep in mind the messages sent to the children. All parents need the other adults around the family to show a positive model and message for the children to hear.

It's no help to have an adult friend or relative around to show the children how to abuse or show disrespect for their

mother or father. The most important help a friend of a parent can give is to show a model of respect for the one doing the parenting. If a friend or relative is not cooperating, ask him/her to start!

Waning Parental Influence

Friends in a support group see your child less often than you do. They can help you with new insights. Gradual changes taking place in a child going from five to ten are easy to miss. We often think of our children as about the same when changes are actually taking place every week and month!

The parent support group can help a Mom or Dad who, not recognizing growth, continue old limits on responsibilities and opportunities. **Timely changes would strengthen their son or daughter's always-fragile self-worth.**

Parents can lose influence just by neglecting the child's expanding areas of interest. So a child's complaint of "nothing to do" should be taken as more than just a complaint about the lack of amusements. It could reflect a need for useful activities that are respected in his limited adult world. **One fast way to alienate a member from a group is to not allow them to contribute when they are ready to do it!**

A strange effect of sexism in our culture is that girls sometimes survive childhood better than boys because they make an earlier contribution to the family, particularly in the domestic chores. While "protecting" the male from drudgery, parents can run the risk of driving their son to find other activities that show he can "do something." **Threatened by the fact of his "worthlessness," he will cast around for a way to be proud of himself—what will he find?** Will it be a suggestion from his Mom or Dad? Or something out of his parent's influence and encouraged only by mischievous others?

Parental influence will face some competition from a child's expanding circle of friends. Friends are likely to reward a wide range of his behavior and seldom reprimand or punish. The intolerance of friends to deviation from the accepted may seem obvious to parents, but examples of the standards are presented by every friend, making adjustment easy. Parents feel an obligation to hold to limits that are not always popular and so

begin with a disadvantage in the competition with their son or daughter's friends.

Positive support is the major advantage parents have in the competition for influence with their child's friends who often remain solely on the critical and negative side. You know how important positive support is, and you can plan heavy doses for good behavior to a person hungry for confirmation that he/she is doing right. Be generous with positive support and clear about what is worthy of support.

It can be tempting to continue support with no particular success in mind, *"I think you're wonderful even when your friends let you down!"* While support like this is often an important role for parents, it could be cruelly misleading preparation for the adult world. Parental coaching is also needed to point out the way to solve the child's social problems.

A parent support group can be helpful here as well. How are other parents reacting to new fads and habits? What good developments are they encouraging?

Actions Speak Louder

Growing up from five to ten brings along some new possibilities for games with parents. **I-may-do-something-very-bad** is a game where the child talks about wild intentions because of the intense reaction his parents give to it. When you suspect this game you can try to inhibit your strong reactions to his verbal description of his intentions and concern yourself only with performance.

Positive support is the major advantage parents have in the competition for influence with their child's friends who often remain solely on the critical and negative side.

These are important strategies to work out in your planning sessions and in your parent support group (you do have one now, don't you?). Without a strategy, you may lead to a situation where the child finds it easy to "get through" to you by making a remark about some absurd behavior he has no intention of performing.

Getting a child to "talk right" sometimes becomes the goal of the parent and the power struggle for the child. **Little talks may become unproductive because if the child starts to lose**

she can always say (promise) what is being demanded without having to carry through. Threats may be made, voices raised and the child may get a good "talking to," but she will only learn to say what is expected and to avoid any genuine discussion of controversial topics.

Fat Cats

Cats seem to be one of the best animals at taking human care for granted. **Give them food, housing and a warm pillow, and they can ignore you for days.** A child growing from five to ten can sometimes take a similar attitude. During a moment of rebellion, a child can act on the false idea that she is perfectly capable of making it on her own. Like the cat, she has been misled by a family situation that provides most of the essentials of life free and with no fanfare. You too could make it on very little if room, board, clothing, medical care, and educational needs were free!

The fat cat problem develops from too few demands for the child to care of herself and too few requests to contribute to the family as much as she can as she acquires more ability. **As the teenage years loom not too far ahead, it's time for more realistic responsibility. But when you give more responsibility you will need to add more incentive also.**

Matching Funds and Graduated Allowances

If more financial demands are to be made of a growing child, then a better means of making and using money will have to be arranged. Allowances are the major source of income for children and the teenagers they aspire to be.

A graduated allowance pays off a variable amount depending upon the behavior of the child. It uses the traditional allowance which is guaranteed and usually unrelated to performance but this is only a small minimum. Responsibilities are listed for the child and additional amounts can be gradually earned over the week. Each time the child finishes a task, it is recorded on a chart. Each task has a value and the accumulated amount is paid off at the end of the week.

The possible increase in allowance need not be more expen-

sive for the family budget. As money accumulates, it doesn't all have to be spent on her amusement and stomach! Consider a matching funds program for clothes, for example, where parents may provide most of the funds but for some items, they may require their child to contribute from his or her earnings.

Parents as Teachers, Coaches, Friends, and "Heavies"

Parental roles change with situations as well as with the ages of the children. Parents need to be aware of these changes and avoid feeling "inconsistent" when different roles seem to be called for. Often a child's confusion over Mom or Dad's changing attitudes can be erased by a frank explanation of their mixture of perspectives:

Jack: *Why can't we have the other cable channels. Everyone else has them.*

Mom: *They cost more money. And not everyone has them, parents in my group say it's too expensive, too.*

Jack: *But we're missing all the good stuff!*

Mom: *You see plenty of TV with its violence and ...stuff, I want you to use some of your time for useful things - where you learn something.*

Jack: *If you were my friend, you would get the other channels. (sounds like a game of "If-you-loved-me,-you-would-serve-me")*

Mom: *Jack, I <u>am</u> your friend, but sometimes I have to be a parent who is a friend who looks out for your future. It's not easy doing both.*

Jack: *Well, I'd be a lot happier friend if I had the other channels.*

Mom: *Maybe so. But I have to be the parent who watches our money and watches out for your learning. I want to be a friend, too. It's hard.*

Does Jack understand all this about conflicting roles? I doubt it. But he does understand that Mom cares and understands what he wants, even when she will not provide it.

Jackie: *All the kids get so noisy at soccer practice. You're the coach, you should tell them to shut up!* (Sounds like a game of You're-the-parent, let-me-tell-you-your-job.)

Dad: *Sometimes I don't want to be the heavy. If there's nothing going on at the moment, they can let go a little.*

Jackie: *I try to tell them.*

Dad: *Hard to control the whole group. Sometimes you should try going off with a friend and doing some passing practice until the next drill.*

Jackie: *You're more strict with me than you are with them!*

Dad: *It's different when they're not my children. Sometimes I worry more over how you are doing. For them I'm only the coach, for you I'm a parent.*

The Rest of Your Son or Daughter's Childhood and Your Parenthood Begins Now

In these chapters I have advocated a practical approach to child-rearing. The philosophy has been that children and adults have more similarities than we sometimes think. The most important similarities are that both deserve respect and room to learn and try out individual habits.

The successful efforts of both adults and children need recognition and support to keep the progress of learning moving forward. In the child's case the feeling of self-esteem is still developing and the positive reactions from parents are especially critical for the child's good feeling about him/herself.

Both adults and children deserve the same consideration

when they make mistakes. The justification for punishment is not strengthened by pointing out the young age or small stature of the victim. However, corrections, feedback, and a chance to make amends are in order for both adults and children.

Good listening habits are crucial to successful parenting. The older the children become, the more complicated the communication becomes and the importance of listening skills grows accordingly.

Along with your success as a parent should come an enjoyment of this important nurturing job. Thoughtful and fair strategies will make your role more comfortable—that's the first half of enjoying parenting.

Along with your success as a parent should come an enjoyment of this important nurturing job. Thoughtful and fair strategies will make your role more comfortable—that's the first half of enjoying parenting.

The second half is to consider your own needs for time, support and respect. Parents need to gather adults around them who will help with the parenting job by respecting and confirming the parent's rights. Sometimes grandma or grandpa may need to be told, *"Mom (Dad), I need your respect and help with the children, but it's harder for me if your remarks suggest to the children that I am not capable."*

If your spouse or a relative live with you, it's even more important that you show each other the respect you expect from the children, and that you come to each other's defense and aid when it's needed.

Your children will probably resemble you. The dominating factor in how they turn out is your model for them. It's a large responsibility to keep in mind and the children's desire for individuality may deny this resemblance just as you may have when you were growing up. But the template against which all effects of parents are impressed is the parents themselves.

You are a natural for the job. You're the one most interested in the welfare of your children, and you're close at hand every day. To enjoy successful parenting, stick to good habits, show a good model, listen, and cultivate some close advisors to discuss problems and solutions. We humans are busy with our complex lives, but we have some extra help: we learn well from each other. So as a final project, consider forming a group as suggested in this last exercise.

Exercise and Summary for Part 5

Ground Rules for Discussions in Parent Support Groups

Parent Support Groups can be a comfort and provide a good sense of direction with the proper ground rules. The group might also serve as a sort of extended family for your child, adding a wider circle of positive adult influences and role models in your child's life.

Suggested concerns that should form the basis for an agreement on ground rules.

The first get together of the group should take up the following ground rules and come to an understanding, if not an agreement, on how each issue will be handled.

Concerning trust:

1. Agree that all discussions within the group will be confidential.
2. Develop rules for telling stories on your children and repeating stories on others' children heard at group sessions.

Concerning consideration for others:

3. Controlling the air time (how long should one person be allowed to talk?)
   What is fair share?
   How will we police the air time?
   Air time on a hot topic.
4. Topic time and free time. How much time for the specific topic of the evening and how much for individual concerns?

Concerning the topic:

5. Selecting topics
6. The group is not an individual therapy session.
7. The group is not a couples therapy session.

Concerning general rules:

8. Degrading the children, even your own, is not allowed.
9. Members act on their own responsibility, for example, in dealing with the schools, and do not take action in the group's name.
10. Splitting the group. Sometimes when the ground rules are ignored, radical changes are necessary for your children's sake.

Suggestions for discussion for a single parent in the parent support group:

1. How can I maintain my role as adult and parent? I need to avoid using my children as a weapon against my former spouse or as a sounding board for emotional problems. I need to be strong, reliable, cheerful and loving for them.

2. Is it true that no matter how conscientiously you help a child understand the divorce or separation, at times, he/she will think it's his/her fault? How have others talked this over with their child?

3. I want to keep my life as stable and predictable as possible for my child. How are others handling current loves?

4. Should I be generous with my former spouse and in-laws? How do you avoid making an enemy of your former spouse and avoid competing with him/her.

How can I work out the best interests of my child with him/her. My child needs to know that both his/her parents love and care about him/her. The more love and generosity there is in a child's life, the better off he or she will be. Shouldn't I welcome all those who have, can or will play a loving role in my child's life.

5. Do most parents stay at home for meals? It's hard to stay away from the easy answer—fast food restaurants.

7. What other books are good on child and teen behavior? Do other books have effective techniques for managing the key issues, such as punishment, fostering self-esteem, social behavior, etc.

8. How have others involved themselves and their children in civic, church or community activities? We all need an ever-widening circle of role models, positive adult influences and support in our family lives. I need some leads on opportunities for us as a family to learn, grow, and reach out to others. Could our group also provide an extended family network for all of us?

Enjoy Successful Parenting

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Behavior Page for Home

(See Exercise 1, page 24)

Question 1: **What would be an objective description of the behavior?**
(Try to avoid conjecture here. What specific behaviors make up the problem?

Question 2: **What triggers the action?**
(What situation, person, or action brings on the problem?

Question 3: **What happens next?**
(Try to focus on the very next few seconds.

Question 4: **Where would you place the possible blame and/or credit?**

Question 5: **At what age would you expect an average child to do what you are hoping will be done in this situation?**

Question 6: **How could we allow more practice?**

Question 7: **When do things happen?**
(Keep a record similar to the one on the next page.)

Behavior Chart

Date/Time	What Happened?	Just Before This?	What Happened Next?	Special Situation and Remarks

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